

THE ULENDÓ DETECTIVES



'With each footfall there was a muffled rattle
see page 67

The
ULENDO
DETECTIVES

★ ★ ★

by
FRANCES
GREENALL

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CHAPTER I

Simon and Jennifer Fly to Africa

THE silver and blue aircraft of Central African Airways was cruising along just above the bush, low enough for the passengers to take such interest as they might in the somewhat monotonous scene below. Most of them were from England and they had changed planes at Nairobi to take what was more or less the local bus service down Africa.

Some of the passengers were reading, others sleeping; the more enthusiastic were sure they had seen zebra.

It was a bumpy flight; but Simon who had not been airsick at all since he left England, was determined not to give in now that he had so nearly reached Kasama and the end of his journey. In any case, his younger sister Jennifer, sitting by his side, looked so cheerful that the sight of her put him on his mettle, and this was better than any so-called cure.

Simon put his head back and took a deep breath.

He thought of his last term at school. He wondered if he'd get his cricket colours next year. He had enjoyed the summer term and was looking forward to his holiday; he thought it was pretty generous of his father to let them both spend it in Northern Rhodesia.

"We're seeing a first-rate travel film, Jennifer," he said, "if only I could bear to put my head down to look."

"It's a bit difficult to see out from here, Simon, in any case. We'll have to travel in a rocket next time, then the wings won't get in the way."

"I wonder what Mummy and Daddy went to see after we'd left," mused Simon. "They said they'd go to a show later in the day. You know, when Charles asked Daddy to let us spend August and September in Central Africa, I thought he was being funny," he added.

"Charles must have forgotten that in our house nobody is allowed to be funny at breakfast time. It's much too early. I expect," said Jennifer, "that's why Mummy and Daddy took the idea seriously and started discussing it with Auntie Kay and Uncle Peter. Being dull at breakfast has got advantages. I was just unwrapping my Easter Egg, I remember quite clearly. I got so excited I split the silver paper and it was a special pattern I wanted to keep."

"Being a District Commissioner must be an interesting job. Uncle Peter usually has some good stories. I wonder if we'll see any of the lions that are supposed to wander round at Mporokoso. Do you remember how Charles said they'd found lions' footmarks in the lettuce beds once?"

"You know, Simon, I didn't believe a word of it until Auntie Kay said it was quite true and that they'd stamped on such good seedlings."

"When you look out and see how flat everything looks from the air, you wouldn't believe there was so much going on down there, would you?" Jennifer commented.

"Well, I can't see much from this dreary seat anyway,"

Simon replied. "That's what comes of having to travel with a girl of thirteen and being given seats where it isn't supposed to be bumpy."

The plane seemed to be following a strip of road which had been cut through the dull green bush with a chisel. "Bush" was a good word for it because grass and shrubs and what one could only suppose were trees, all looked about the same colour from the air, and it all appeared to have no height. Here and there, looking like small toadstool circles, were native villages, and narrow winding paths leading from them twisted their way to the main road.

"I don't think you need complain about not seeing anything. Have you taken a look at the character that got on the plane at Tabora," Jennifer said, giving Simon a quiet prod with the corner of her book.

The seat across the gangway had been empty when they left Nairobi; but at Tabora a curious, bearded fellow edged his way along, carrying more hand-luggage than anyone had ever seen before. He had slung about him several cameras and a compass in a leather case. Hung from the shoulder that was free from cameras, this man had two black oblong boxes. "They are the sort of boxes you put butterflies or botanical specimens in," thought Simon.

The man wore sandals, and carried a fly switch made from a zebra tail. He was now reading *Alice in Wonderland*. Jennifer giggled. "Who ever can that be," she said, doing her best not to appear rude; but Simon looked responsible and stern. Then he too, burst out laughing.

"Have you seen his name, Jennie? I can just read the label on his C.A.A. travel bag. It says 'Doctor Foster'! It simply can't be true."

"Well, he won't get his shower of rain in Northern Rhodesia at this time of year, anyway; and from what I've heard of the climate from Uncle Peter, he'll be jolly cold in those sandals. I suppose he's terrifically musical or

frightfully clever. Sandals would mean that, in England. I wonder if it's the same here. People like David Livingstone wore boots and gaiters to keep out the leeches. Perhaps Doctor Foster isn't that kind of an explorer."

"Please fasten your safety straps," said the air hostess, "because we are just going to land at Kasama."

Jennifer and Simon seemed to have done this dozens of times since they said goodbye to their parents the day before in England. However, this time it was far more interesting, for it meant they'd arrived. With luck, they'd see Uncle Peter somewhere around waiting for them.

"What'll we do, Simon, if Uncle Peter isn't there?" said Jennifer. Then she looked at Simon and saw that he'd said something silly. He was wearing what Mummy called his "lofty look."

"Men like Uncle Peter are always there," he replied. Jennifer took no more notice of him and decided to keep her mind on Doctor Foster, who had now closed his book and was sitting there, threading his fly switch in and out through his fingers. The other passengers started to fidget too, and collect their hand luggage and papers.

"Got your camera, Jennie?" asked Simon, who was making a methodical collection of all his belongings on the table in front of him. The plane began to circle round as though looking for Kasama. They could see the air-strip easily; but where on earth was the town? The control tower then passed the window and seemed to be peering in at them, and at the far end of the field they touched down. Then the plane turned and roared up the runway back to the airport buildings. Steps were brought out and the door opened. Passengers began to file out, looking stiff and a bit crumpled. Some of them made quite cheeky remarks to the hostess as they passed her at the top of the steps.

Simon and Jennifer were almost the last, but they had thought of everything. "We've even remembered our

hats and sunglasses," Simon said to the air hostess as he got out.

"Well done; and I hope you have a simply lovely holiday. I often wish I could stay for a while in some of the out-of-the-way places that I touch down on, and really get to know what they are like."

Then she turned to the next passenger. "Doctor Foster, you are getting off here too, aren't you? I've seen you before, haven't I, on this run down from Tanganyika?"

"Yes, I travel down by air in an hour or so, and go back on the ground and take two months, perhaps. Silly world, isn't it?"

Jennifer had listened to this conversation with so much interest that she forgot to move along and get out. So Simon got hold of her arm. He was so busy looking for Uncle Peter that he didn't hear Jennifer saying, "There, I'm sure he should be wearing boots and gaiters like Dr. Livingstone."

Then Jennifer saw Uncle Peter and dashed down the steps. In her excitement she dropped her hat, her handbag and the newspapers from England. They all scattered on the tarmac. The high wind opened the papers and made collecting them up twice as much work.

"I'll give you a hand, clumsy," said a voice; and she looked up and almost bumped into Uncle Peter. Simon ran away at top speed to catch two bits of paper which were starting to fly off. He puffed his way back to the plane and handed his 'catch' to Uncle Peter.

"Mummy said we simply must bring you our newspapers because it's such fun to have really new ones, miles from anywhere. We hung on to them at Nairobi like anything because everyone on the airport there tries to grab them."

Simon was still out of breath, after the paper chase.

"We had such a splendid flight out here, Uncle Peter. A super pilot with two D.F.C.s and goodness knows what else. I'm so excited about our holiday at Mporokoso. I say,

I must have got terribly out of condition eating all those sandwiches and things on the plane," he panted, very apologetically.

"Of course you haven't; but you can't expect to run as well up here where we're 4,000 feet, as you can at home by the sea," Uncle Peter commented, more or less to himself because he was really getting the luggage sorted.

"Charles will be along in a minute; he forgot to get his T.A.B. injection renewed at school. You will have had to get all that done before you came away."

Everyone leaving the plane had their hands full, with books and jackets and all kinds of small handbags. Simon and Jennifer said goodbye to some of the passengers. Then the pilot, who had by now caught them up, gave Jennifer a friendly wink and said: "Don't forget to climb a tree if you see lions and you haven't a gun."

The small crowd of people passed through the airport buildings and out into the yard behind.

"Here we are! I brought the van in from Mporokoso to meet you because I can collect stores and a couple of bags of cement, as well as all of you and the luggage. You must come and meet Lazalo."

There was a young, cheerful looking African standing nearby. He was fairly tall and was dressed in khaki shorts and a shirt, and a round pillbox hat to match.

"I left Lazalo here," Uncle Peter explained, "to keep an eye on the van, otherwise he'd have been out there on the tarmac with me to greet you. Lazalo, this is the Dona Jennifer from England."

"Mutende, Mama! Mutende, Mama!" said Lazalo, clapping the palms of his hands together in greeting. "Mutende, Bwana," he then said to Simon, who grinned back at him, hoping he was looking as friendly as Lazalo was.

"What's all this mean, Uncle Peter," said two voices. Their Uncle took a deep breath and thought of the number of questions he was going to have to answer in the next

few weeks. "It means 'peace to you' really; but in fact it's the 'how d'ye do' of this part of the world. They say 'Mutende, Mukwai' to each other," he explained.

Coming up the hill towards the airport was a cyclist. He was bending over the handlebars and pedalling with all his might. When he saw the little group by the van he let out a great yell of delight. Once up on the level ground, he came racing along and by using the soles of his shoes as well as his brakes, he came to a sudden noisy and dusty standstill.

"Daddy, wasn't it mean?" said Charles. "I told the Sister who was giving me my T.A.B. injection that I could hear the plane coming in, and that I wanted to be up at the airport with you to meet Simon and Jennifer. All she did was to go on rubbing my skin with meths and then she got out her best blunt-pointed needle."

Simon and Jennifer and their cousin Charles all started to talk at once. Uncle Peter tried to get them to take a little interest in the loading of the truck, but nobody noticed. They were too busy exchanging news.

"It's up to us, Lazalo, I can see that!" said Uncle Peter. Lazalo, who by now was up on the van and taking hold of the luggage, laughed and said "Ee, Bwana."

"Don't let the suitcases rub against those crates, if you can help it, or it will spoil them. That's right! Put this new lot of suitcases next to Bwana Charles's stuff that we took off the Salisbury plane yesterday."

"Ee, Bwana!" said Lazalo, as he grabbed the last bit of luggage.

Charles was at school in Southern Rhodesia and to his great delight had been given permission to have his holiday at the same time as his cousins from England. This was very popular with Charles, who loved the country and thought it far more fun to go out hunting for lion, than doing Latin or French.

"Hey, just one moment," said Uncle Peter, trying to compete with the noise. "When Charles remembers to

unhook himself from that old bike, I'll put it on the van. I shall drive. There will be room for two extra in front, and so two will have to sit at the back. I've got a couple of other Africans to pick up as well, who will be waiting in the centre of the town."

"Well, Jennifer will have to be one of the people in front," Charles insisted. "So Simon and I had better sit at the back?"

Jennifer looked a bit disappointed at this, but then remembered. "Yes, I'll go with Uncle Peter, and we'll have Lazalo for our third passenger. Then I can ask them all sorts of questions."

So the schoolboys settled themselves down amongst the suitcases and the van rattled off down the hill.

"I'm not going to waste time," Uncle Peter said. "I want to get to Mporokoso this evening. It's round about 11.30 now. If we hurry away and have a picnic lunch, we can be home by five o'clock. We'll go to the post office and cable your parents to say you've arrived safely and at the same time collect the mail for Mporokoso. Then we'll go to the shops and pick up our bacon and butter, and the two Africans. After that—off we go into the blue and the party's begun!"

Uncle Peter whistled a little tune, to warm himself up, he said, because he was glad to be inside the cab and out of the wind.

In spite of the rattle, Simon and Charles could be heard talking and laughing. "Have they got their hats on, Jennifer?" said Uncle Peter. She peered through the small back window and thought they looked very comfortable. They had re-arranged the suitcases to make armchairs and were sitting like two old men at a cricket match, grey felt hats pulled well down over their eyes for shade.

A Landrover, driven by an African, skidded past throwing up a great cloud of dust. It had a passenger with a beard, Jennifer noticed, as they flashed by.

"There was such a funny man on the plane, Uncle Peter. He was called Doctor Foster. He wore sandals and he was reading *Alice in Wonderland*. I did think it seemed queer."

"Well, Jennifer, there's a saying that if you are long enough north of the Zambesi you go right round the bend. Perhaps that's what happened to Dr. Foster. Where was he going?"

"He wasn't going anywhere—I mean he got off here. In the Landrover in front—that's him."

"Heedless of grammar, Jennifer?"

"Yes, I know, 'but what gave rise to no little surprise, nobody seemed one penny the worse.' I often recite bits of *The Jackdaw* to myself when I want to keep awake."

"Do you feel sleepy, now, Jennifer?" enquired Uncle Peter, making a particularly noisy gear change which was greeted by shouts from the two arm-chair travellers in the back.

The visit to the post office and shops was soon over. There were crowds of Africans in the main road—the only real shopping road. There were men and women; but the parcels were carried by the women. They carried them on their heads. The nice flat bundles looked easy to manage; others more tricky. One colourful lady was walking smartly along, her baby slung across her back, and on her head she balanced a bar of soap, a saucepan and a bottle of paraffin, all at the same time. The handle of the saucepan was towards the front, and it looked like the beak of some queer bird, as she turned her head round to talk to a companion.

All the shops had verandas, where African tailors sat at sewing machines, making shapeless dresses, watched by friends and customers.

Half-way along the main street Charles tapped on the window and Uncle Peter pulled up.

"Daddy, your messengers are trying to signal to you," he said as he pointed to two Africans dressed in blue

drill uniforms with red trimmings. They were wearing scarlet fezzes.

Charles explained to Simon that the Boma was a Government office, where District Officers worked. There were Bomas all over the country.

"They started by being police posts, and were built for protection some fifty years ago. Now the Boma is where the African goes to post a letter, talk about his affairs to the District Commissioner, get some aspirins from the dispensary, get good seed for his garden—just about everything!"

The two last passengers for Mporokoso jumped on the van; they sat down, side by side on a large crate marked "Marine engine. This way up."

Simon hadn't taken much notice of the assortment of packages before, but he did say to Charles that he thought it odd to be taking a marine engine out to a place like Mporokoso.

"A long way from the sea, yes; but don't fool yourself about being a long way from water. It may be out in the blue, the bundu, the bush—or whatever you like to call it, but there is a lake in the extreme north-west of the district, where Daddy is planning to take us to stay at an old disused Boma. The house is supposed to be haunted, so they say. We'll be about three weeks up there. We can just get it in nicely in the time. Anyway, I'm not in a hurry to get back to school."

"Nor me," agreed Simon. "I'm not anxious about that either. But you are a bit nearer your school than I am, Charles. You are at least in the same hemisphere."



CHAPTER II

Mporokoso

THE road out of Kasama to Mporokoso was wide and dusty. The surface was reddish gravel. The trees on each side had been cut back for some distance so that if any fell during the storms, they would not block the road.

Jennifer was surprised to find the trees so tall, and astonished at their weird shapes. They had all looked like shrubs from the air. The thick dusty undergrowth and oddly shaped ant hills, anything between three and fifteen feet tall, curtained off any view other than the straight wide road in front of them.

A few miles out the road crossed the Lukulu river by a bridge made of huge timbers lashed and bolted together. "It looks like one of these clip-together toys," Jennifer thought. The river was low, and on flat stones some African

women were doing their washing. Their babies were taking part in the wash day too, for they remained slung on their mothers' backs while they bent over the water to bash and bang pieces of cloth. There was a lot of talking and laughter and they happily stopped work to cheer and wave as the van drove by.

There were little piccanins, too, paddling along the edge of the river, who jumped and smiled and kicked up great splashes of water as tokens of their goodwill.

"Are you going to stop at Chilubula, Bwana?" Lazalo asked. "Because my brother is at the White Fathers' Mission school there and I can go and see him."

"Lazalo, yes. I think we'll just go in to see the Fathers, but we won't be there for long. You see," said Uncle Peter turning to Jennifer, "brother means almost any relative; might even be a third cousin five times removed—and they always take ages to find."

"No, Bwana, this really is my brother. His father and my father had the same mother."

"There! What did I tell you. It's a cousin. Anyway, Lazalo, I'll be there for half an hour, and if you haven't seen your cousin by then, we'll have to try again next time. I'm always waiting about on these trips for somebody's relatives to turn up; but it's my day for relatives today, Lazalo!"

"Ee, Bwana! I think there is too much dust today. I will see my brother some other time. When we get to Chilubula I will find somewhere out of the wind and I will sit and shut my eyes to get the dust out. Too much dust, today."

There was a village on the left-hand side of the road; a collection of about seven, round, thatched huts. They were grouped together in a clearing. The ground between the huts was dry and hard and a woman was sweeping away leaves and rubbish with a short-handled grass sweeping brush.

Down the little path to the main road came an African

cyclist. On the carrier at the back of his cycle was a roughly made basket full of complaining chickens. There was a woman, with a baby on her back, sitting on the cross-bar.

The cyclist pedalled along without a thought for passing traffic. He wobbled over the bumpy grass verge right into the main road in front of Uncle Peter's van, which pulled up smartly, skidding on the dry surface. The passenger and the chickens squawked with fright. Some very uncomplimentary remarks were made by Simon and Charles on the subject of road safety.

Uncle Peter said you could never be sure a road was really free from excitement. "Somebody I know was driving along a particularly lonely bit of road. Suddenly from the bush an animal appeared and bounced right across the path of the car. Before he could pull up, the astonished motorist found he had a large antelope weighing half a ton straddled across the bonnet and his windscreen was shattered."

Jennifer asked Lazalo if he thought things like that would happen to them.

"Ee, Mama," he replied, and then pointed out that Chilubula was in sight.

"Well, this is a different kind of surprise, but it is astonishing to see a really big church right out in the bush. It would look a big church in London; it looks simply enormous here."

The Priests at this mission had been their own architects and builders, and hundreds of miles from the nearest city stood a fine cathedral.

"You get surprises of all kinds in Central Africa," Uncle Peter said.

The visit was a great success and the Missionaries were happy to greet the three schoolchildren. "We see so many African boys and girls in our schools that we almost forget there are English schoolchildren too," one of them said.

One of the older Priests said: "We are so glad you have called, Mr. Plender. I was just going to write to you to forward a letter which came in our mail for you. It's from one of our church members on the far side of Mweru. He asked me if I would send the letter on."

Uncle Peter opened the letter and read it. "I suppose you know this man, and would be able to say that he was a reliable person. He says that over in the Mweru area a witch doctor has appeared. I suppose he means medicine man. He says he's openly practised magic in defiance of the law."

"Oh yes, I know him well. He's an old man and greatly respected. I'm sure you can rely on his report."

"I'll look into this shortly," Uncle Peter said. "I have to tour that area within the next few weeks and I'll bear this in mind."

Jennifer went up to Charles and whispered: "What's all this about magic. I didn't think grown-up people took magic seriously. Shall we know more about it?"

"You won't know any more about it if you talk to me instead of listening to what's being discussed." Charles sounded a bit annoyed. "We haven't actually been told not to listen. I know that my father's planning to tour the district they're talking about, so we may learn more about it ourselves."

The Missionaries invited them all to stay for lunch but Uncle Peter was firm about only being there for half an hour. However, in that time a basket of oranges, bananas and avocado pears had been collected for Charles to take to his mother at Mporokoso.

Charles's eyes rested on the shining bottle-green pears. "I simply adore avocados," he said. "Do I really have to give them to Mummy and Daddy!" He picked up one of the larger ones and handed it to Simon. "You'll like them too, I'm sure. They look hard and uninteresting, but you cut them in half and take out a stone about the size of a golf ball. Then you put in pepper and salt and vinegar

and dig away at the lovely green, oily, fruit. You can cut them up for salads too. Some people mash them up and put them inside sandwiches—shocking waste. I could eat a dozen right off at one go.”

“There should be about a dozen for each of us,” Simon said.

“And how sorry you’d be!” remarked his Uncle, who added: “Anyway, I like them too, you know.”

Some fifteen miles from Chilubula, at the foot of a steep hill with high banks on each side, the road crossed a green meadow. It was built over a cement causeway, which looked a needless piece of construction over such flat ground.

“There now, I thought we’d have our lunch down there. There are some nice shady trees just before you reach the dambo proper, and there’s a village on the other side where Lazalo and the messengers can have their food,” Uncle Peter said.

The lunch basket was unpacked at a place where some fallen logs made convenient seats. Everyone was hungry and very thirsty. Jennifer poured fruit juice out into glasses and Charles filled them up from a water sack. This looked like a canvas shoe bag full of water. It was wet on the outside from seepage, and inside the water kept fresh and cool from continual evaporation. There was a small china spout in one corner.

“This cool drink’s marvellous. I’ve never been more thirsty,” said Uncle Peter. “It’s this frightful dust.” He stopped drinking for a moment and said: “This reminds me, too, of a speech I make every holidays to Charles. Unless you are told otherwise, all water here is bad, either for drinking or swimming in. You can get the most awful illnesses from doing either. So, don’t forget, don’t drink anything but boiled water, and come and ask first if you feel like a swim. In any case, even if the water is all right for swimming, there are probably crocodiles.”

“Do crocs really kill people, Uncle Peter?” asked Simon.

"I should think they do! They drag them under the water and drown them first. Really most unpleasant creatures."

Jennifer said they looked rather sweet dozing away in the zop. In reply to this Charles gave her what could only be called 'a look.' He was just finishing his last piece of sausage roll and he started to choke. "Sweet! She thinks crocs are sweet!! For goodness sake, Jennie."

Jennifer let out a great yell and started to shake her foot. Charles couldn't believe that his scornful comment would have had such an effect; but Jennifer hadn't even heard him. She had been suddenly surprised by an attack of hot needle pricks round her ankles.

"I can see them—ants," said Simon. There were five or six black soldier ants clinging to Jennifer's socks.

"Then there are probably some more heading this way. Yes, look! There they are," cried Charles, pointing to a column of threes, marching straight along, over the logs and down again, as though some invisible hand was dragging a skein of black wool through the bush.

Uncle Peter helped Jennifer to pull the ants off.

"What bad luck. I know they are jolly painful; I am sorry. Just keep still, and I'll see if there are any more. It's lucky there were only a few. You can get a lot of them on you and not know, until the leader gives the order to nip. People have had to de-bag in the middle of golf matches," Uncle Peter said, trying to cheer her up. "Auntie Kay got them in her slacks in the garden last week, but she was able to run into the house and jump into a bath."

"I suppose I shall get used to all this," Jennifer said a little doubtfully. "But it's such a surprise after being in London the day before yesterday."

"Yes, it must be," Uncle Peter said, "and I think it's time we got on our way. You shall have breakfast in bed tomorrow, Jennifer, and a real rest. You can have a tray with bacon and eggs and marmalade, and you can spend

as long as you like telling yourself that you are now at Mporokoso."

So they packed up and drove across the causeway to pick up the Africans.

Simon asked Charles why this bridge had been built across a meadow.

"It looks like a meadow now, in spite of the long grass, but it's called a 'dambo' really. That's just a peat bog, and in the rains it all fills up and is more or less like a lake. It's quite dry just now, of course. Dambos are marvellous places to look for game in later on, when everything else is either dried up or burnt out. We should get some hunting in a few weeks."

Simon said he didn't think he could ride well enough to hunt, but Charles explained to him that this was the White Hunter's kind of hunting. You required, not a horse, but good strong shoes, thick trousers and an old jersey, so that you could crawl along the ground unobserved, close up to the game.

Later in the afternoon, when there was no warmth left in the winter sun and the passengers in the van looked stiff and tired, they reached Mporokoso.

There was, on the left, the emergency airstrip and further along to the right a small tin-roofed house. Then there were the Government offices with the flagstaff outside. The flag was down because it was just after sunset. There were various stores and outhouses, then, last of all the long, thatched house of the District Commissioner. There were friendly lights shining through the windows and Auntie Kay and Aileen, who must have heard the car coming, were standing together in the big entrance porch. The welcome was exactly as each one, in his imagination, had pictured it would be.



CHAPTER III

About Witchcraft

CHARLES was very happy to be at Mporokoso again. He and Simon got up early each morning and cycled round the station, from the hen houses to the vegetable garden and on to the cattle kraal. One morning they went to the brickfields where, in a small dell Africans were pressing ant-hill mud mixed with sand and water into brick moulds. The moulds were emptied at the end of a line of grey bricks which had been made the day before and were now half dried. The field looked like a giant's game of dominoes. A thin layer of straw had been scattered on the top of the bricks to prevent them from drying too fast in the sun.

"Do they stay that horrid colour?" Simon asked.

"No, they turn red after they've been baked. Here's Dixon, the capitao—the African foreman that is. Mutende Dixon!"

"Mutende, Bwana; we are making plenty of bricks this

year. They will make a lot of new buildings on the Boma."

"They look jolly good bricks, too, Dixon. What were the ones like that I helped you with last year?" Charles enquired. "Mummy was so angry with me," he said turning to Simon, "because you see, I had my new shoes on and I was absolutely coated in mud. I was a frightful mess!"

"After you left, Bwana Charles, it was very exciting because we thought the rain was coming. There were little clouds in the sky and all our bricks had not been burnt. But it was all right, they were not spoilt. We did get them burnt in time. The little clouds just made cheek and blew away again."

Some of the new bricks had already been piled up in a kiln. There were gaps, at intervals in the base, where log fires would burn to bake the bricks.

"It looks like a picture of ancient Egypt," said Simon. "I can see now why they say you can't make bricks without straw. Although the straw isn't put into the mixture of mud and sand and water, you have to have it to protect the drying bricks from the fierce heat of the sun. Brickmaking hasn't changed so much after all."

Charles asked Dixon what the time was, as though this was the most natural thing in the world to ask someone who wasn't wearing a watch.

Dixon looked across to the early morning sun, then at the shadows on the ground. "It would be twenty minutes before eight, Bwana Charles," he said.

"Come on Charles, breakfast. Goodbye Dixon. When we get back from Chiengi we'll come and give you a hand."

The two boys hurried up the hill towards the house.

At breakfast Uncle Peter said he wanted all hands to help get things ready for *ulendo*—the word they used for touring—he explained. "We'll go as soon as we can to Chiengi because I must enquire into the reports of witchcraft offences in that area."

"There are a lot of people to arrange for this time, Peter," Auntie Kay said. "I'm going to need help. Cookie's got the stores list we usually use, and if we multiply it by six it should see us through. Well, by seven, because of Simon and Charles, who never seem to get enough to eat."

"That's all right for the stores, Mummy, but you'll have to remember not to multiply the paraffin and shoe polish and the bottle of ink by seven as well!" Aileen laughed away to herself.

"Well, let's hear about your list Aileen. I don't want to see twenty day-old chicks and the kitten on your list of necessities."

"Mummy, I can't leave Sooty behind. Really I can't. She loves *ulendo* and she can travel in a basket. She'll be so lonely without me. After all, I've taken her to the Mission in my bicycle basket."

"Yes, and we very nearly made enemies of some very kind neighbours, when Sooty was bike-sick and ruined two pretty new cushions."

"Mummy, you know Mrs. Heaton didn't mind a bit. She gave Sooty some 'muti' to make her better. Sooty is very clever and she will probably help us to witch-hunt at Chiengi. Witches in pictures always have black cats."

"My dear girl," said her father, "this witch doctor won't be an old lady on a broomstick. He'll be a grizzly old man, unwashed, and dressed up in a frightful collection of old rags—if we get him! Now, old rags remind me," said Uncle Peter looking mischievous, "what about asking Jennifer to mend some of my socks before we go away?" Everybody laughed and said: "Don't take any notice of him, Jennifer—darning's not a holiday!"

Uncle Peter finished his breakfast. "I'll be over in the office, Kay. Tell me when you want extra help and I'll send over some messengers."

There were many things to be remembered. Food had to be packed in tin boxes, and so did anything else that

would spoil easily. The garden boys brought up large baskets of vegetables—cabbage, cauliflower, tomatoes, beans and peas—in fact all the things that Jennifer had been eating in England just before she came away. Then there were paw-paws, big as footballs, some ripe and yellow, some picked green so they would ripen later on. There was a basket full of oranges, lemons and limes; and two whole branches of bananas.

"I shall start at the beginning of the day," Jennifer said, "and go right through making a note of what I shall need. Like this. Get up in the morning: write down 'dressing gown and slippers.' Wash. Write down: 'tooth-brush and washing things.' Do you think I shall want a book to read?"

"Not while you are cleaning your teeth!" Simon teased.

Aileen, who in the end made her parents agree to take Sooty, was less methodical. She just rushed from room to room saying: "Oh my ears and whiskers; oh my ears and whiskers; how late it is getting," until, when everyone was thoroughly annoyed, she was sent outside to feed her chicks.

"Just help me check these things, Jennifer," her aunt said, as she handed her a list. "Put a tick against the things I call out."

"Box of lamps; 8 gallons of paraffin; box of saucepans, a bag of flour. Salt? Yes, here it is. Ten pounds of salt. That should do us till we get to Chiengi. They make salt up there, so we shall be able to get more when we arrive. Tick sugar off the list too."

"What an awful lot of salt for a few days, Auntie Kay. Why ever do we take so much?"

"It's for eggs. I expect ten pounds will do."

"For eggs?" Jennifer exclaimed. "How ever many are we going to eat?"

"To buy eggs—salt is money." Then her aunt saw the look of astonishment on her face. She laughed. "I suppose I sound quite mad, Jennifer! In a hot country salt is such

an important part of people's diet that they would rather have it, ~~in~~ out of the way places, than money. The local Africans bring in eggs, and we pay them with spoonfuls of salt. Even the cattle at the Boma get salt. Friday is salt-lick day, and they always know! They start moo-ing early in the morning. *Muchele* is the Bemba word for salt, and according to Aileen, every Friday the cows chant 'Moo-cheli, Moo-cheli.' I must say I'm inclined to agree with her."

Someone came running along the front veranda and into the house. It was Simon.

"Auntie Kay," he panted, "Charles said could we have Uncle Peter's gun?"

"Certainly not! Whatever for? You haven't found a snake, have you?"

"It's the same thing; well, perhaps not quite though," he added upon reflection. "There's a most enormous hawk, with a wing span of at least a yard, hovering over the hen houses."

"Really, Simon, you gave me quite a fright. I thought it was something important. There are always hawks about and they are very tough birds to kill."

Jennifer ran back with Simon to watch. The great bird hung there, without movement, like a bronze brooch pinned on the sky. Then, uneasy at the sight of so many people, it swirled away into the blue distance.

It was agreed that *ulendo* should begin the following day. By evening nearly everything was ready. After supper as they sat round the fire in the drawing room, there was a great discussion about making an early start.

"I love being out in the early morning, when it's cool and the heavy dew has made the ground slightly damp," said Auntie Kay. "There's no dust if you set out in time. I've arranged a picnic lunch for us to have on the way."

"Will you have some milk for Sooty?" Aileen asked. She was sorry afterwards that she had drawn attention to herself and made them notice that she had not yet gone

to bed. After she said 'goodnight,' Uncle Peter took out his map of the district.

"I'll show you where we are all going tomorrow," he said, pointing out the cycle paths with a match stick. "Mweru is a big round lake which seems to link Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo. Here's Chiengi, at the eastern corner."

"I learnt about the Luapula river at school, Uncle Peter," Jennifer told him. "It runs into the bottom end of Mweru and makes a boundary. The Belgian Congo is on the other side."

"Bottom end is rather like talking about the 'blunt end' of a boat. But you are quite right about the boundary, Jennifer. Once, over a hundred years ago, there was an old slave raiders' route along the shore of Mweru. Then, when David Livingstone made his last journey, he explored the territory between Lake Nyasa and Lake Mweru; 1866, that was the date. It looks an out-of-the-way place, but there has been quite a lot of contact with the outside world. Now Greeks who have settled in the Congo run a fishing industry on Mweru. You'll probably see some Greek fishing boats."

"I must confess that I'm more interested in the medicine man, and magic than in Greeks," Simon said. Then he remembered something. "Uncle Peter," he said, "I read somewhere that all these Africans believe in the supernatural and in spirits. Is this really true?"

"Well, a great many of them do, in spite of all the work that's been done by schools and in the Missions. The Missionaries would be the first to admit that the primitive belief in witchcraft and fear of wizards or witches is still general. These beliefs and fears are encouraged by the witch doctors, who depend upon them for the maintenance of their reputation and even for their livelihood," replied Uncle Peter. "A witch doctor can do a great deal of harm to the community, and indeed is a handicap to the development of African society as a whole."

"Do you remember somebody having trouble in getting a houseboy. Then they discovered that their cook was popularly believed to be a wizard, so that nobody would work with him?" put in Charles.

"Yes, I remember," his mother said. "Fish pie and rissoles were his main forms of sorcery. Though nobody would have called him a wizard cook."

"You mustn't confuse medicine men—who some people refer to as a witch doctors—and wizards. A wizard is a person who, people believe, has magical powers, which he uses to discomfort people who have offended him in some way, and who, consequently, he has a grudge against. Africans do not believe that accidents or illness happen by chance or neglect. If a branch of a tree falls on you, or if you have a tummy ache, there is no simple explanation such as—the branch was dead, or that you have eaten too many sweets. No; you have offended one of the people you know who, unknown to you, is a practising wizard and has cast a spell upon you and caused this thing to happen."

"So a wizard who is also a cook is in a very strong position," remarked Simon.

"Now this is where the witch doctor comes into the picture," continued Uncle Peter. "For a fee, which you will normally be required to pay in advance, he will use his professed supernatural powers to help you. By a process known as 'divining' he will find the imaginary magician who has bewitched you. Wizards or magicians are still greatly feared and their evil practice preserves people's terror of them."

"It seems hard to believe that educated people believe all this," Jennifer said.

"It sounds to me worse than keeping on the right side of all the masters at school," added Simon.

"Educated people probably don't, but this is all carried out in great secrecy because of the heavy punishments awarded to people who are caught divining and, fortunately, it is now on the decline."

"It must make you terribly suspicious of everyone, Uncle Peter," said Jennifer.

"Yes, it does, and it means that you are nearly always fearful of some disaster or other. Then every now and again something will happen which makes it look to the African as though his ancient superstitions are correct. •

"An African fears most of all the awful powers of the magician. There is one kind of magician called a 'chisanguka'—an old man with the ability to turn himself into a lion at night. I'll tell you a story about a 'chisanguka'; but first I've got to pump up this pressure lamp, or we shall all be sitting in the dark." The light from the paraffin lamp had almost faded away.

Charles said he would do it, and got up and pumped air into the base of the lamp, using a little knob which was there for the purpose. Six or eight strokes of the pump, a hissing noise, and the incandescent burner was giving off a bright, white light once more.

"That's better, although I must admit that a dim eerie light would be more appropriate to the story I'm about to tell.

"There was an old man who was wanted in connection with a murder, and a messenger was sent to a distant out-station to arrest him and bring him to a neighbouring Boma. The messenger was very unhappy about this mission, but he carried on, arrested the supposed wizard and put him in the local gaol. That night, when the moon was down and jackal prowled in the shadows, the terrified messengers heard a lion rumbling and roaring round the Boma. They fastened the shutters over their windows and put props of firewood up inside their front doors. The grumbling filled the night air. Anyway," said Uncle Peter, smiling, "nothing happened except that everyone who had heard the noise looked wise and whispered: 'chisanguka,' 'chisanguka,' to each other.

"The next day the messenger escorted his prisoner the rest of the way, but owing to some delay the case

opened in the afternoon. It was possible to take the evidence of only one of the sixteen witnesses, and the case was adjourned until the following day. This one witness gave particularly condemning evidence against the wizard, but he had done his duty as a good citizen.

"So the wizard spent yet another night in gaol. In the early hours of the morning, people on the Boma were awakened by hideous screams which faded away into the distance. Somebody was being carried off into the bush. In the morning the body of the first witness was found, rent and mutilated. It bore the unmistakable marks of a lion.

"Not unnaturally, all the other witnesses ran away, and when the District Commissioner tried to resume his enquiry not one of them could be found! They had vanished to secret places in the bush."

The listeners sat still, waiting for someone to break the silence. They could hear the drums being beaten down in the village. There was a pattering over the calico ceiling and small dents in the cloth showed the tracks of some creature making its way at speed.

"Spirits," laughed Simon, a little self-consciously.

"No, only mice," Charles said, and they all began to talk at the same time.

CHAPTER IV

Bush, Bicycles and Bantu

SIMON and Charles agreed to get up early to make sure their bicycles, bought second-hand for their holiday, were in working order. When they awoke, however, they realised there were people up before them. Looking out of the window they saw a wonderful collection of ruffians out in the yard. There was an African rolled up in a blanket, others in very old jerseys and tattered coats, the more raffish wore hats or had their heads tied up in scarves. They were the carriers.

The Head Messenger was giving them their loads. The big tin bath had two carriers. It was awkward and heavy because it was filled with kettles, choppers, axes, mincers and anything difficult to pack elsewhere. The carriers picked it up to try the weight and took a trial trot round the garden, groaning to demonstrate how heavy it was, but doing dancing steps to show they were in fun.

As the morning warmed up, the carriers became more chatty, until the Head Messenger found that his instructions could not be heard, even by the man next to him. "Chongo," he shouted. "Chongo!" and for a moment there was a lull. One by one they got their loads and jogged off to join the line of people which trailed away into the distance and disappeared into the bush.

"We shall have to think about making a start ourselves," said Uncle Peter. He looked round and saw Sooty's ears sticking up over the edge of a bicycle basket.

"No, Aileen, you are not going to take Sooty in that basket. She'll jump out and get lost in the bush. She can

be closed up in her cat basket and this can go on the top of one of the lighter loads. That chap over there hasn't got a full load. He can take Sooty."

In spite of her bitter complaints, Sooty was perched on high and carried off with the rest.

"Give them a bit of a start, and then you push off," Uncle Peter said. "Lazalo and the advance party went soon after five this morning, so things will be fairly well settled in camp by the time you get there. I have to tour one or two villages on the way. I'll give you and the children the Second Messenger, Kay, for your guide. You should be in camp before eleven, so it won't be too hot. I expect Aileen will be tired after the first few miles, so she can be pushed the rest of the way."

Simon thought this was quite the most exciting picnic he had ever gone on, and when he looked at the whole family in their oldest clothes and dilapidated felt hats he didn't think there was a lot to choose between themselves and the carriers. One by one they got on their cycles. The Second Messenger led the way, followed by Charles and Simon. Jennifer came next, then Auntie Kay and Aileen, with a younger messenger bringing up the rear.

As they looked back they saw Uncle Peter waving. Beside him were two more messengers and two African clerks who had the office work which would be carried from village to village. The Head Messenger was rolling a Union Jack into a neat bundle.

Shortly after leaving Mporokoso the bush paths became narrow and the overhanging branches were only a few feet above the heads of the cyclists. The little track wove its way round ant hills, avoiding slippery sandy ground or fallen trees. Lurking along the edges but out of sight, were round hard ant hills, like inverted pudding basins. Auntie Kay caught the pedal of her cycle in one of these and greatly amused the children by falling off into the grass. The messengers were too well mannered to



'One by one they got their loads and jogged off . . .'

• • *see page 33.*

laugh, until the same thing happened to Jennifer and then to Charles.

"You'll get used to them," Auntie Kay said. "Watch for the ant hill when you bring the pedal down. That's when they get you and make you fall over. It's rather like riding up against a hidden curb stone."

Charles and Simon tried to hold a conversation, but the path was too narrow for cycling two abreast and it was discouraging to talk for long to somebody's back. So they rode in silence.

The Second Messenger, acting as guide, pointed out the more difficult obstacles in time for them to slow down, and it was pleasant riding along in the freshness of the early morning, through woods dappled with sunshine.

"I thought we'd see more wild flowers, Auntie Kay," Jennifer called out. "But there's nothing very much growing except grass and trees."

"It's winter, you mustn't forget, and it's dry, Jennifer. All those flowers you see in our Mporokoso garden have been brought from other parts of the world—the roses, sweet peas and salvias. They would be dead too, if the garden boy didn't water them twice a day."

Coming along towards them was a curious file of people. At least, Simon supposed they were human beings. They had two legs, which certainly looked as though they belonged to Africans. From the shoulders upwards all human features disappeared underneath enormously narrow, floppy hats, anything from one to two yards long. When they got a bit nearer, the hat became a bundle of grass. These people had been out to some dambo to cut thatching grass, and they were carrying it back to their village on their heads. The first figure was greeted by the Second Messenger.

"Mutende, Mukwai," he said.

"Mutende, Mukwai," came a muffled voice from beneath the grass. The second bale also had something to say before stepping aside to let the cycle party through.

They turned their shoulders to keep the load lengthwise, rather than across the road. If not, they would have prevented anyone from passing.

"Mutende, Mukwai," said each walking bale of grass, as about six in all were left behind in the quietness of the bush.

"People don't look very interesting without their faces, do they?" Jennifer said.

There had been a certain amount of talk and banter between the people who were passing and the messengers, in which the word 'mulilo' seemed to be important.

"'Mulilo' means fire," Aileen announced. "I wonder why they kept on mentioning it. They don't use thatching grass for making fires." Then she called out to the young messenger: "Are they repairing thatch that's been burnt in a fire?"

"No, Mama," he replied, "they were saying that there was a small bush fire further along this pathway."

Aileen passed the news along the line of cyclists but the Second Messenger just smiled when the message reached him.

"It will be quite all right. We will just ride by quickly. It is late in the year, so most of the burning has been done."

Presently they heard a noise like thousands of small brittle sticks being broken, and some smoke and tiny charred feathers of what had once been vegetation were being carried along the path by the breeze.

Auntie Kay wasn't any more worried than the Second Messenger, because she, too, knew that the bush had been burnt earlier in the year. This early burning was deliberate. Areas of bush were set ablaze, shortly after the end of the rains. The burnt leaves and grass and pieces of wood helped to supply the very poor soil with ash for fertiliser. Fires could also be kept within bounds by firebreaks—lanes cut and cleared, across which the fire could not spread. So, when she saw little tussocks of flaming grass a few feet from the roadside, she called out: "Just cycle by

—it's really quite safe. It's when we're motoring past bush fires that I get frightened in case the petrol tank catches fire."

Suddenly the Second Messenger got off his cycle. He held up his hand to tell them to stop. About ten yards away the bush was burning right at the very edge of the pathway, and little tongues of flame were licking the dry ground like thirsty dogs. The flames swept first this way and then that, consuming sticks, leaves and dry grass lying in the path. Then the flames bridged a narrow place in the cycle track, making a small wall of fire which cut the path in two.

"Please Mama, go back just a little way," the Second Messenger said. He had such an air of authority that none of them argued, although it was far from easy to turn a laden cycle on such a narrow path. When they were out of the way of the smoke, they looked back and saw the two messengers beating the flames at each side of the pathway with bundles of branches they had hastily collected. Simon and Charles joined them, having also provided themselves with suitable fire-beaters. It was far easier to beat the flames out than the two boys had expected. The important thing was to keep the pathway clear.

"We can get by now, without burning our tyres," Charles said, adding, "if I have to choose between beating out a fire and mending punctures, I think fire extinguishing is far easier and quicker."

So, once more they set off on their way. Presently the path led down an escarpment, and after travelling for about half an hour, they came to a clearing by some African huts, and sat down on a ground sheet to have a rest and eat some lunch.

Aileen thought she had cycled far enough, so the young messenger looked around for a forked stick, which he fastened to the frame of her cycle, so that he could push her along. Jennifer, though she would never have admitted

it, was glad there was only about another five miles to go, and they were all happy when they could hear the sound of voices and of wood being chopped. They knew they were near the camp.

The camp site had been used before. It was near a village. In the centre of the clearing there was a grass shelter, like an African hut without sides. Under this 'nsaka' there were camp chairs. Lazalo was busy laying a table and putting out glasses and fruit juice. There were water sacks hanging from the side poles. Carriers rushed forward to take their cycles and Auntie Kay and her fellow travellers dropped thankfully into the chairs.

They were all rather quiet and dusty. In a few minutes Aileen was fast asleep.

Most of the camp was already up. There was a grass shelter for the bathroom with the tin bath now emptied of its load. Two poles had been set in the ground to hold a cross-pole for a towel rail. There was an improvised wash-basin stand too.

"Every modern convenience," Simon said with admiration, when, after a short rest, he walked round inspecting the camp. "And everything made with hoes and axes and timber from the bush!"

Buckets and empty petrol cans held steaming bath-water over open fires, and Cookie was preparing his fireplace. He took a sheet of corrugated iron, which had been carried from Mporokoso and had seemed such a peculiar piece of luggage. He placed this over four equally matched 'pudding basin' ant hills. Spread underneath was a glowing fire. In a short while he had a splendid kitchen stove.

In fact, all was ready, except the main tent. There was some delay in getting this up because one of the men carrying the poles had cut his foot on a thorn bush, and this had made walking through the bush rather slow.

Soon, however, after a good deal of shouting and 'heave-ho!' noises, the cottage tent was up. This, with the

bell tent, the bathroom and the 'nsaka' made the camp look more like a village.

The afternoon sun soon lost its heat and long before dark the sharp wind warned the campers of a cold night ahead of them.

The bathroom, with its novel fittings was a great success and by five-thirty they had all bathed and put on their warmest clothes. Jennifer and Aileen changed from cotton slacks into corduroy trousers and jerseys. Later on they each had a pull-over and a scarf on as well.

To make dinner-time more important, Aileen tied up her short fair hair with a ribbon. Jennifer's red curls, which according to Simon accounted for her hot temper, were brushed out for the occasion. 'Coconut matting' was how Simon described Jennifer's hair, when during the day it was coated with dust. As an elder brother he could hardly admit that Jennifer's hair was really rather pretty.

Gradually the family assembled in the 'nsaka.' They could see the three camp fires and hear the quiet chatter of the carriers. Jennifer noticed what soft voices all the Africans had. There was none of the shrillness of an English crowd and they seemed to talk quite an octave lower. There were forty or more carriers in all, and she was astonished that they could be so animated, and at the same time remain so unobtrusive.

Like all African cooks, Robert was proud of his achievements in camp. He arranged a beautifully hot, four-course dinner.

"I'm so hungry, even these horrible flying creatures roasting themselves against the lamp glass don't put me off," Simon remarked.

It was true. The lamplight attracted the most extraordinary collection of curious insects, which beat their wings against the hot lamp chimney and fell dead or dying on the table.

"I'm going to put my plate on my knee. After all,

this is a picnic," Auntie Kay said. "Then I needn't see all those things squirming on the table."

Charles laughed at his mother and said that even if one of those things like a tiny winged sausage fell into his soup, he wouldn't care at all. He was far too hungry for it to matter.

"Are these flying sausages really ants?" Jennifer asked. She was told that there were many different kinds of ants or termites. It was at the beginning of the rains that most of them grew wings. The best known was the 'white ant' which did so much damage to people's property. Aileen described with great glee how a large colony had once been on the move at Mporokoso and had flown into the sitting room through a tiny crack in the window frame. They had left their wings in a huge pile in one corner of the room, where the lamplight was strongest. "We had to get a dustpan and brush," she added, "to collect all the discarded pairs of wings."

Uncle Peter looked at his watch. "I'll just get the headlines on the B.B.C. news," he said as he leant over and turned on the portable radio which he had set up before dark. There were some curious noises as he adjusted the waveband, till a well-known voice suddenly announced, without any of the customary introduction that ' . . . following the arrival in London today . . . '

"Bother," said Uncle Peter. "I've missed the beginning. We'll go on listening though, till we get the cricket scores."

This was the first reminder all day that they were a twentieth-century family, and it was only the sight of Lazalo bearing a dish of roast chicken, that brought Simon and Jennifer back to their unaccustomed surroundings.

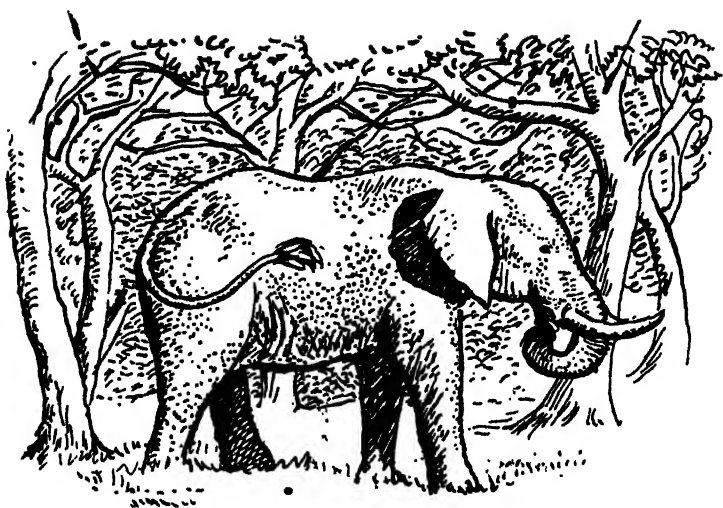
After dinner Uncle Peter suggested taking their chairs across the camping ground to the big fire. They joined the circle of messengers and carriers, and listened to the camp humorist, happy in the relinquishment of the zinc bath, explaining how he had greeted a passing stranger and in

so doing had let go of his end of the bath, which had then dropped on his toe.

The wood crackled and sparked. After a while there was a pause when the camp story-teller came into his own.

"Where's Chola?" asked Uncle Peter. "How about one of your Kalulu stories?" He turned and explained to Simon and Jennifer that Kalulu the Hare was the most admired animal of the African bush. "He is bold and clever, wise and crafty. Because he is a genius he can outwit the strongest and largest animals. There are hundreds of 'Kalulu' stories," added Uncle Peter, "and new ones being invented round camp fires every moonlight night." He looked round. "What's it to be, Chola? I'll ask Lazalo to translate for us as we go along."

Lazalo came round towards them. There was a shuffling sound as each person removed from the firelight that piece of him which was just about to roast, and offered in its place one of the freezing surfaces which had been chilled by the wind.



CHAPTER V

How Sooty meets a Gaboon Viper

BWANA," said Lazalo, "Chola says he would like to tell the story about Kalulu when he challenged the hippopotamus to a tug of war."

"That sounds an impressive task for one small hare," Simon commented with surprise.

"You'll find that what he hasn't got in size and strength, he makes up for by using his brain," Uncle Peter said.

The firelight and the crisp air combined to give the camp fire an artificial look—more like a stage scene than something that was happening to ordinary people. The story-teller began a few lines of his tale and then paused

while Lazalo translated. Their voices sounded like the variations on a theme in a fugue.

Kalulu the Hare went out very early one morning. It was fine, and Kalulu felt pleased with himself and with the great big world.

"I wonder what I will find today," he said as he walked along, his ears pricked up and his nose twitching. "I am happy today," he said, "and it is good to be a Kalulu!"

He tramped along the edge of a big river, where Imfubu the hippopotamus was having an early morning bath. He wallowed and blew and made joyful noises in the water. Kalulu stopped to watch him. "Mutende Mukwai, mutende Imfubu," he said.

Imfubu raised first his head and then the huge dome of his body out of the water. "So it is you, little Kalulu. Good morning mukwai!"

"You look well, mukwai, very well indeed. Just stand still for a moment while I admire you," said Kalulu. "You certainly look big and strong. Indeed you look almost as strong as Kalulu the Hare."

Imfubu the Hippo opened his enormous pink-lined mouth and gave an enormous hearty laugh. "So you are strong, little Kalulu, as strong as I am!"

Kalulu bowed respectfully. "I am stronger than you," he replied.

Imfubu the Hippo came out of the water with big, heavy steps. He lumbered over the mud to the bank. "So! Kalulu is stronger than I am," and he gave another big rumbling laugh.

"That is so," said Kalulu. "I can prove it to you. Why, I can pull you along quite easily."

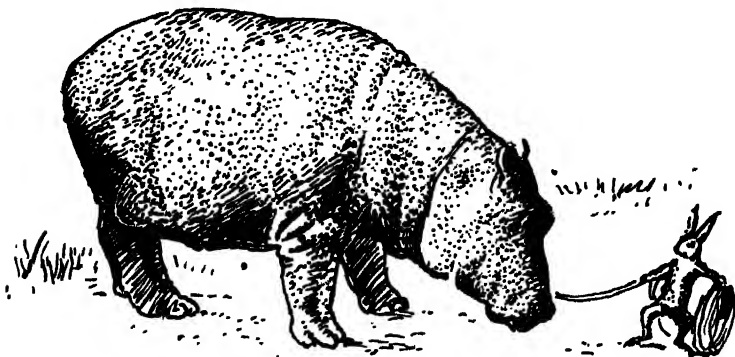
Imfubu bent down to look at the little Kalulu. He said: "You are joking; but jokes can be taken too far."

"I am quite serious," replied Kalulu, "but first I must put this long, strong, length of rope, around your neck so that I can pull you by it."

So Imfubu inclined his head and Kalulu put the end of

a rope made of tree bark around his neck. Imfubu made a snorting noise and ambled away, back towards the water. "Now we shall see, little Kalulu," he laughed.

Imfubu the Hippo found a deep pool in the river and turned and wallowed and blew spouts of water into the air.



Kalulu and Imfubu

Kalulu bid him goodbye, and went away over the river bank. His long, strong length of rope was in a coil slung over his shoulder, and he paid it out as he went along.

In the dambo grass on the other side of the river bank Kalulu sat down. "I am happy today," he said, "and it is good to be Kalulu." Then he spied the big, grey hulking form of Nsofu the Elephant.

"Mutende, mukwai," he said to Nsofu the Elephant. "You look well this fine morning. You are out walking early."

"Mutende, mukwai!" said Nsofu. "So are you up early, little Kalulu. Have you found anything interesting yet?"

"We are too early, mukwai. Only you and I are up," said Kalulu. "But I have something to show you. I want

you to try on this fine necktie which I have here. I am sure that it will make you more handsome than any of the other animals, Nsofu."

Nsofu bent down, first on one knee and then on both. He allowed Kalulu the Hare to try on the long, strong, bark necktie which he had brought with him as a present.

"This is most kind of you, little Kalulu," said Nsofu in dignified tones.

"It is nothing, Nsofu. I like to see you looking so handsome." Kalulu stepped back to admire the elephant in his new bark necktie. Nsofu was very tall and Kalulu had to step back a long way to get a good view. Nsofu the Elephant lost sight of him in the grass.

Nsofu raised his trunk and made a great trumpeting noise. He was happy and he moved away in search of the herd.

"This necktie is not such a good fit as I thought," said Nsofu, as he felt a tugging at his neck. "It was comfortable enough when Kalulu tried it on," he muttered to himself.

"Mwa! Yangu!" said Imfubu the Hippo, as he played in the water. "This Kalulu must be strong. I can feel him pulling on the rope around my neck." So he went up stream a short distance and then stepped out on to the river bank.

But Nsofu the Elephant found his necktie getting tighter. He gave a great heave and Imfubu, down on the river bank felt another tug from his opponent.

So Imfubu and Nsofu pulled and tugged, retreated and advanced, trumpeted and bellowed the whole day long, from sunrise to sunset.

Darkness approached and Imfubu and Nsofu feared the prospect of a night spent in struggle.

"I shall follow the rope," said Nsofu the Elephant, "and I shall try to find out what has happened."

"Before it is quite dark I must discover the secret of Kalulu's great strength," said Imfubu the Hippo. "I shall follow the rope until I reach Kalulu the Hare."

And so it was, when the afterglow was turning into night, that Nsofu and Imfubu met in the dambo grass over the edge of the river bank. They both laughed and made a great noise till the ground shook and the trees rocked backwards and forwards on their roots.

"Ya ba! So!! The little Kalulu has been playing one of his tricks on us again."

Hidden by some bushes not far away, a hare stamped his back legs and twitched his ears. "I am happy," he said, "and it is fun to be Kalulu."

Chola and Lazalo had finished their tale. There was a rustle of laughter round the camp fire. It was several minutes before the audience returned to the world of men, and remembered to place more branches on the camp fire.

They all agreed that they had enjoyed themselves tremendously and had a wonderful day; but it was no good trying to pretend not to be tired. Sooty was already curled up in the cottage tent, on Aileen's bed, waiting for her to go to sleep. As Aileen crept under her covers, which she liked to do without undoing the sides when she was sleeping in a camp bed, Sooty tried to get under too. They were very amused to watch her as she burrowed down to the foot of the bed and then came up again to put her head on Aileen's pillow.

While she lay awake under her mosquito net, Jennifer thought she could hear more night noises than she would ever do at home. There were weird birds cawing and croaking, the buzz of crickets and the bleat of bull-frogs. As Auntie Kay was still reading by the lamp light, Jennifer decided to ask her which was the animal with the cough.

"Cough?" said Auntie Kay. "I can't hear anything coughing. Oh, perhaps I can after all! You mean the creature that sounds as though it's got a dry throat? Why that's a leopard, but it won't come near the camp because they are dreadful cowards. When it sees the fire

and knows there are people about, it will creep away again and leave us alone."

Auntie Kay said that leopard or no, she was going to put out her light and go to sleep.

Nobody could tell afterwards at what time they first heard the lion roar; but it seemed to growl in short blasts, as though it paused when it took breath. It came faintly at first, like a very small storm blowing up, and it sounded as though it were passing round the outside edge of the camp. Uncle Peter put his head inside the tent and told Aileen and Jennifer not to be frightened, as he, and several of the messengers had guns.

"I'm not particularly anxious to go out looking for him," he said, "because it might take ages. There is always the risk, too, of wounding him without killing him and that's the way you turn an ordinary lion into a man-eater. They are usually wounded lions that some hunter hasn't taken the trouble to finish off. If he looks like leaving us alone, then we'll ignore the whole incident." This was, in fact, exactly what did happen, but they all agreed afterwards that the sound of lions roaring is far less frightening when you know the animals are safely behind bars in the Zoo. In the morning Lazalo took them out to look for the lion's spoor. The footmarks were not easy to find because the ground was dry and hard, but in a patch of loose sand they found one about the size of an ordinary saucer.

There were a number of visitors to the camp that morning, Africans from nearby villages who were anxious to see what the Bwana was doing and to have a look at the European children. A small crowd of piccanins collected just outside the bathroom doorway, where Auntie Kay opened up her camp hospital on an up-turned packing case. The children had beaming friendly smiles, and one or two carried toys or some other treasure for the 'white Mama' to admire. Their clothing was striking and varied. One little girl had on a boy's shirt which she wore as a

dress; another girl had on a thick jersey. Some of the tinier children wore no clothes at all and they looked even more dignified than the ones with clothes as they stood there, pot bellied, watching with their large serious eyes. They walked along with all the dignity of busy penguins.

Various members of the *ulendo* arrived for treatment and Auntie Kay, with Jennifer as her assistant, started to put bandages on cut fingers and toes, or drops into bloodshot eyes. Cookie had a burn on his arm, thin and long like a knife edge, where he had caught it against the end of his corrugated iron kitchen range.

"I'll put some of this oil on it Cookie. I am sorry that this should have happened, when you've been so good to us," Auntie Kay said. .

"It's nothing, Mama. The oil will soon mend it," Robert replied.

"I've got a sore foot, Mama," one of the carriers said.

"Mama, please may I have some plaster on my leg?" asked another.

"Show me where your leg's sore?" Auntie Kay said. "I know you all love to be covered with plaster, whether you have something wrong underneath the dressing or not!"

"I have a bad head, Mama," one of the two bath carriers complained.

"Epsom salts and two aspirins," replied Auntie Kay in a 'Red Queen' voice.

He drank down the epsom salts as though it were fizzy lemonade and really pleasant. Jennifer was astonished to see how brave they all were when they had to take nasty medicine, but her Aunt explained that if they were given something which tasted disgusting, then they thought it must be going to do them a lot of good. A pleasant tasting medicine would not cure them so well, of course!

While all this was going on, Auntie Kay and Jennifer heard Aileen saying, "Do come and look at Sooty. All her hair is standing up on end. I wonder what she thinks she's found under that box?"

Then Uncle Peter's voice said, "Oh, I should leave her alone. She's got to go into her cat basket in a moment. The carrier's ready to take her off."

Jennifer went round to the back of the camp to see what was happening. Everyone was busy packing loads which were then taken off on the next day's march. Jennifer noticed that Sooty was hissing at a petrol box, her tail fur standing out like a bottle brush. Lazalo, working nearby, was packing up the lamps. It was one of the empty lamp boxes that interested Sooty so much.

"Silly old cat," called Simon. "I'll move the box over so that she can see," and he went across to do so. He pushed the cat away with his foot and stooped to pick up the box. As he did this, he looked down—then stopped quite still. Jennifer said afterwards that Simon's hair stood on end like Sooty's. He took his hands off the box, but remained bending over it for a second. Meantime the stupid cat went on hissing. Simon stepped back and picked her up. He handed her to Jennifer and went over to find Uncle Peter. He explained to him what had happened and brought him over to the lamp box. "Look," Simon said, "there's a brightly coloured snake curled up there, amongst the stones, half under the box." Uncle Peter looked and ran quickly back into the tent for his gun.

Lazalo glanced up from his packing when he saw the Bwana, shotgun in hand, making for the boxes. He came over to look and then ran to the tin bath for a hoe. A small crowd gathered and the noise awoke the snake. First it raised its square head, and then started to move its body which was about as thick as Simon's arm. It was about two feet long and coloured like the gayest 'fair-isle' jersey any of them had ever seen. It hissed, and at the same time there was a crack of the gun. The snake shook

and twisted; the powerful muscles flexed. Uncle Peter shot it again—"for good measure"—he said, and one or two of the Africans came forward and beat it across its back with sticks.

"Whatever's going on," Auntie Kay said. She hadn't taken much notice of the commotion until she heard the shots.

"I've just killed a gaboon viper that was hiding under the lamp boxes, Kay."

They noticed that now it was dead, it was changing colour, and although nothing seemed to alter its hideous face, which was square like a bulldog's, with two huge fangs showing, the bright purple and terra cotta chevrons running down its back were fading.

"That's just about the most deadly snake in Africa. It's immensely strong, and can kill cattle easily," Uncle Peter said. "I think nothing could be more ugly, either."

Aileen explained that poor Lazalo, who was really very frightened indeed, owed his life to Sooty. For it was Sooty who first told them that something was wrong with the petrol box, and who stopped Lazalo packing lamps into it.

"Now that she's been so brave and saved all our lives, can she travel in my bicycle basket please," Aileen asked.

"I suppose we can't say 'no' to Sooty any more," said Auntie Kay, who added: "I really think I want to get out of this camp and start on our way." So they all agreed to help with the packing so that they could begin the day's journey as soon as possible.

One of the Africans picked up the dead snake on a forked stick and flung it away into the bush.

Uncle Peter said that because of the adventures of the past two days they would all stay in one party, and after a third night under canvas the whole family, and their followers reached Chiengi.

CHAPTER VI

Ghost Hunt at Chiengi

IN the late afternoon, after a hot and dusty day of cycling, Jennifer was glad to think the journey was nearly over. It had been great fun; but how lovely not to have to make an early start tomorrow.

Simon called out: "Is that a mirage, or is it really true?" for round the bend in the road they all could see the shining waters of Lake Mweru.

"Three cheers! We've arrived," laughed Charles, as he flung his legs up over the handlebars. He tried to do a circus act on his bicycle, but fell off into the dust.

The track widened and joined a road which led to a small thatched cottage on the lake shore. There were a few trees round the house and tall pawpaws, their single stems ending in a small cluster of fruit and leaves. They looked like sentinels, while the ragged banana trees provided what shade there was in the yard. Although it had been neglected, it was easy to see there had once been a garden.

"The lorry's arrived too," said Charles, now recovered from his dust bath. Let's go and give them a hand with the unloading." It had brought some of their heavier stores, and letters and papers which had arrived the day before at Mporokoso. There was, too, the crate which had first caught Simon's eye, when he came off the plane at Kasama—the marine engine for one of the Fisheries Officers who worked in the Mweru district.

"Do you like exploring empty houses, Jennifer," Aileen asked. "I love to, except for the spiders."

"But this one isn't empty," Jennifer said. "We've almost moved in; and look over there, Lázalo has even put a saucer of milk down for Sooty. I should get her out of your cycle basket quickly. She must have hated being shut up in that basket and taken over all those rough roads, poor thing."

Aileen didn't like anyone—not even Jennifer—to call Sooty a "poor thing," but she unfastened the lid of her cycle basket without saying so. Sooty raised her head and arched her back. She shook out her fluffy black tail and jumped to the ground. She soon finished the milk and then sat on the doorstep and washed her face.

"Sooty's quite at home," said Auntie Kay. "I hope to see a bit more face-washing done by the rest of the family too. Do you know that you are all a kind of ginger-brown from the dust." They hadn't noticed, but it was quite true. Their faces, hats, clothes and indeed everything, was coated with fine dust. There was dust in the creases of their eyelids and it seemed to be hanging in Jennifer's hair.

"Come on Jennie, let's explore," said Aileen throwing her bike against the wall. They walked into the centre room, where there was a table and some chairs. To the right were two small bedrooms and on the left a third room and a bathroom. There was no ceiling anywhere and the walls ended long before the rafters and thatch began. Lazalo and an assistant were busy tying mosquito nets to the cross beams above the beds.

"I don't think there are any mosquitos, Mama Aileen," Lazalo commented, "but there are plenty of bats and this will stop them flying down on you at night."

Jennifer wasn't listening. She had gone into the little bathroom to peer around. She called out "Fancy finding a proper bathroom with taps and water."

"People used to live here, that's why," came the answer from the next room. Jennifer turned on the tap marked 'hot' and there was a bubbling sound. A tiny



cooked frog came out in a jet of boiling water. She turned the tap off quickly, wondering what on earth could come out next, and went to tell Uncle Peter who had just arrived.

"It's no good worrying about little things like that. I'm so glad the water's really hot. Come on and I'll show you how it's done." He led the way round to the side of the house, under the bathroom window. Charles and Simon, who soon tired of unloading the lorry, ran up from the lake side, and joined them.

"Now here's a lesson in how to get running water," Uncle Peter remarked.

"I know—something to do with gravity," Jennifer chipped in.

"Jennifer always knows," said Simon, with a sigh. He was thinking what a lot an elder brother had to put up with.

"Well, she's right again this time. Here are two large petrol drums, and they've been put on their sides. You can see the little square opening which has been cut in the uppermost surface. That's where the lake water is poured in and explains how we get a cooked frog from time to time."

The drums were perched on brick pillars about three feet high, and under the one nearest the house there was a wood fire.

They all turned round, as a procession of gay-looking women and young girls came in a single file up the slope from the lake. They carried every possible kind of container, from 4-gallon petrol tins to large calabashes.

"And now," said Uncle Peter, "you can see how the water reaches the system. It's carried up from the lake."

"Having a bath is much more fun when you're really dirty," Charles said, "and I don't know who's going first, but I shall certainly be early in the queue."

"And miss having to help with the unpacking," Aileen said. She explained afterwards to Charles, who was just about to twist her arm, that she had only been talking to herself.

They all followed Uncle Peter into the house to see what had come in the mailbag from Mporokoso. There was tremendous excitement when they found in the letters from England some photographs of children they knew. This family was spending the summer holiday on the coast of Somerset, where they had a boat.

"It looks like the coast of Mweru," Jennifer remarked. "I'm sure if some of our photographs were put beside this one, provided you couldn't see a dug-out canoe or a palm

tree, you really couldn't tell the difference. Their holiday clothes look very much the same as ours do, too. Look at their warm jerseys!"

Robert, the cook, who didn't consider that they were camping any more, provided yet another banquet for their evening meal. This time they had roast venison, because one of the messengers had shot a buck.

"How exciting food is when you've been out all day," thought Simon; and Charles, who somehow read his thoughts said: "I think ulendo food is the very nicest in the whole world."

"Well, that's no excuse for sitting there eating away like Henry VIII," said his mother.

Charles had hoped that no one was watching him as he slipped a large slice of bread into the rich brown gravy, then cut off a narrow slice which he piled high with red currant jelly and popped into his mouth.

"I simply had to do it with my fingers, Mother," he said, "otherwise I'm sure I should have made a far worse mess. I only used one hand which, since you insist on a history lesson, Queen Victoria is supposed to have said was permitted."

"Victorian children were supposed to obey their parents, Charles, and never allowed to answer back," said his mother. "It must have been so easy to bring up children in Victorian days," she added with a sigh.

Everyone was in bed by nine, so it must have been several hours later that Aileen woke up and began to listen to the borers gnawing at the rafters and the thatch. It was a queer, creaking sound, on quite a different note to the sighing of the waves on the lake shore.

Jennifer turned and wriggled in the next bed.

"Jennie—I'm awake. Are you?" Aileen whispered.

"Sh, I'm sound asleep. Don't disturb me," said Jennifer with a giggle. Aileen wanted to laugh too, and tried not to.

"Be quiet, you two," said Simon, from the room next

door. "I can hear all your silly laughter because there isn't any top to the wall."

Aileen asked him if he could hear the borers in the roof, and Simon replied that if it was that grating noise, then he certainly could.

"Are you sure about the borers," he teased her. "I thought it must be the Chiengi ghost filing its nails."

"Do you think we should get up and look?" Jennifer asked. "I've got a torch."

"I think it's too cold to get out of bed," Aileen said in a far-away voice.

"Well, if you're frightened, you needn't come. Simon and I are getting on our dressing gowns and slippers." This was Charles. So he was awake too!

Just at the moment the four of them were about to creep into the big room, some creature moved across the floor making a noise like a dentist's drill. Simon and Jennifer stopped quite still, and were really rather afraid until Charles said, "Don't worry about crickets. That's no ghost either."

"There's such a lot of noise going on, I don't suppose we'd hear a ghost anyway, however loud it rattled its chains," Simon said.

Aileen gave a little shiver and said she'd go back to bed, and the others agreed that as she was so much younger it was the best thing she could do.

That was enough, of course, to make her lead the party across the room into the bathroom. "I thought I heard something different—in there," she said.

Jennifer followed next, keeping her torch shaded by the palm of her hand. There seemed to be a faint scratching sound from outside the window.

"The moonlight makes it look black and white like a photograph," said Charles, who was trying to open the window very carefully. "I'm afraid the paint is old and it's stuck," he said. "But perhaps that's just as well. If anyone makes a noise it won't be heard outside."

"Have you noticed how the smallest sounds carry in Africa," Simon remarked. "I noticed some Africans miles away this evening, working down on the shore, and though they were almost out of sight, you could hear them easily."

"Do be quiet, if you know so much about sound carrying," snapped Jennifer. She hadn't meant to be quite so rude, but everything was exciting and rather weird.

Simon listened again carefully. He could still hear the scratching sound. Was it a mouse? Was it the branch of a tree rubbing against the woodwork somewhere near the window? There was rather a high wind that made an impatient sound in the leaves. But this was different. It was more like someone sharpening a pencil. A spectre of cloud sauntered across the face of the moon, so for a moment the yard was no longer in view.

There seemed to be soft-soled feet shuffling in the yard. A tall African came round the corner of the hot water drum. He had his back to the moon, so they could not see his face which was in darkness; but he had on a red and black checked shirt.

"So I was right. I did hear a different sound," Aileen said with surprise.

The African ran his hands down the brick pillars then looked at the place where the fire would be.

"Do you think he is going to light a fire?"

"It's far too early—or is it late. No, I don't think so, Aileen," replied Charles who had now taken charge of things.

They watched the African fumble round the fire-place. He tripped over some logs which had been piled up in readiness to heat the next morning's bath water.

"Perhaps he wants to get a light for something," one of them said.

"Then why is he so interested in the pillars? He could strike a match anywhere."

At this moment a bullfrog let out a noisy "kerrax,"

and the stranger jumped back from the water drum quickly.

"That gave him a fright," was Charles's comment. "Which seems to show that he shouldn't really be here. Or do you think it is all of us who shouldn't be here and he just didn't know we were coming?"

The African looked round once or twice and the watchers at the bathroom window could see his face, although he could not see them. Then he bent down, as though he wanted to look as inconspicuous as possible, crossed over to the trees where he must have left his bicycle, for he got on it and rode away.

"I've never heard of a ghost riding a bicycle," Charles whispered. "I wonder what that fellow was up to."

"I'm going back to bed to think it over. Come on Aileen," Jennifer said.

"No doubt in the morning we shall be given the benefit of your thoughts; but don't tell me you believe in ghosts," Simon warned her.

They were soon back in bed, and after tucking in their mosquito nets, were fast asleep in no time.

CHAPTER VII

Simon and Charles Lose their Way

As the family finished breakfast the following morning Lazalo came in to say that the local Chief had sent a present to the Bwana. Round to the front of the house came the messenger, with a live chicken nestling in his hands. He made a low bow and handed it to Uncle Peter. The Bwana thanked the messenger and gave him a box of cigarettes and some money to be taken back as a return present to the Chief.

After this interruption nobody was very interested in breakfast any more, and Aileen took the chicken out to Cookie. "Poor thing," she said, "they've tied it up by the legs with a frightfully tight bit of string. I do think it's cruel," and she wandered away saying to whoever would listen, what she thought of people who were cruel to animals.

"I quite imagined we'd be on our own here," Uncle Peter said, "but it looks as though we shall have a visit from some of the International Red Locust people."

"Do you know when they are likely to come?" Auntie Kay asked, "so that I can have meals ready?"

"I'm afraid I haven't the faintest idea. The letter just said they would be doing a survey of Mweru Wa Ntipa, the Mweru marsh, and that they would pass through Chiengi."

"Are locusts a real menace, Uncle Peter?" Jennifer

always wanted to know about things. It made life so much more interesting if you knew what was going on around you. •

“Once they did seven million pounds worth of damage in East Africa. Huge swarms ate up all the grass and thousands of cattle died. Now they spray the breeding grounds with chemicals before the creatures have a chance to take off.” Uncle Peter was busy, preparing for his day’s work, and said he was sorry not to have more time to talk about locusts and that Jennifer should ask the “Locust Man” when he came to Chiengi.

A few Africans were collecting outside the house, in readiness to tour the nearby villages with Uncle Peter. Charles and Simon were told they could go to.

As they waited with the crowd, Simon noticed that the Africans were using a different kind of handshake from the one he had seen before.

“Do you think it’s a secret society,” Simon said, but Charles assured him that this double handshake was the traditional one. When they met, they held out their right hands and did the handshake Europeans do. Then, without unclasping hands, they twisted round and grasped each other’s thumbs. Then they shook hands again, in that position.

“These are old-fashioned people up here and they keep to their old customs,” Charles explained to Simon.

“Well, if ever I want to found a secret society, I shall have that as a sign of membership. It’s a wonderful way of meeting a friend.” Simon and Charles spent the next few minutes greeting each other like long lost Bemba brothers, which greatly delighted the Africans who were watching.

Very soon Uncle Peter joined them and they all started off for the first village. Uncle Peter with the messengers and most of the clerks went on foot. The two boys took their cycles.

“I wonder what kind of a day we’ll have today”, Uncle

Peter said. "The Chief hasn't called to greet me yet. I asked him to meet me here yesterday."

They were soon on the outskirts of a village. A group of little boys and another of young girls clapped and said "Mutende!" as Uncle Peter went by. Next came a gathering of women. Their form of greeting was to put one finger in their mouths and shake it while they let out a shrill warble which Uncle Peter always called 'lulululing'. This was followed by hand-clapping. The piercing warble started again as the Bwana passed them, raising his hand to salute. There was a great deal of noise, which conveyed the impression of considerable politeness and respect.

The final group was of men, led by the headman of the village. They bowed low and clapped with their finger tips together and a hollow space in the palms of their hands. This made quite a different sound from the usual kind of hand-clapping. "Mutende. Mutende Bwana!" they said in courteous tones.

Uncle Peter inspected the village, which was very clean and tidy. Simon found himself wondering where they put everything before the Bwana's visit. There was simply no rubbish at all. Then he noticed one or two black patches in the empty village yard, where obviously there had been bonfires recently. So that was how they managed to have their village looking so very clean and tidy!

The Headman, a very old man with a wrinkled face and beady eyes, led them to a small 'nsaka.' The messengers brought folding chairs and the flag was flown from an improvised pole. So the real work of village touring began.

While Uncle Peter sat and listened to all the troubles, hopes and complaints of the villagers, Charles and Simon went off to explore. They saw four or five speckled guinea fowl picking their way along a bush path, and some wild geese flying towards the marsh. Otherwise there was nothing of particular interest to them and they were glad when it was time to go on to the next village.

"I say, Simon," Charles said when they were just about to enter the final village for that day, "let's ask Daddy if we can cycle home ahead of him. I haven't said a word to anyone about that African at the water drum last night, but I'd like to get back in time to organise watches for tonight."

"Yes, and to tell those two girls to keep quiet about it all—unless they've told the whole world already," added Simon.

"One of us might manage to hide outside and get some idea of what he's really up to."

When they suggested returning to Uncle Peter, he agreed and asked one of the clerks, who also had a cycle, to accompany them back to Chiengi. So the two boys said goodbye and set out for home with their guide.

They rode along quite happily for half an hour and reached the second village in the day's tour.

"We're all right so far—no lion, no snakes, not even a puncture. We should be home quite soon," Charles said to Simon. Their guide agreed that it was only about seven miles now, to Chiengi, at the very most. He added that he would like to stop in that particular village for a few moments, as he wanted to ask his wife's brother if he could borrow his shotgun. Simon and Charles sat on a log and said they would wait for him.

"You should see some of their guns, Simon. Anyone wanting to make a collection of antique firearms should tour the bush. Not only antiques, either. They have dreadful muzzle-loading things made from bits of old pipe, that shoot absolutely anything from tin tacks to ball bearings. You touch it off with gunpowder."

The two boys sat discussing the many and varied weapons which Africans use, and Simon remarked on the fact that he hadn't seen a single African carrying a bow and arrow.

They were both getting impatient, and though they had probably only waited a quarter of an hour, it seemed ages because they were so anxious to get back.

"I really can't be bothered to wait around any longer for this chap," Charles said.

"Couldn't we go and ask one of those girls over there to go and fetch him, he must have asked about the gun by now."

"Far better just to push off," Charles said. "After all, we're nearly there. Let's leave him to follow." They cycled homewards until they came to a fork in the path. The left one was a little wider, so they took that, and were able to ride along side by side.

"It's funny that this path seemed so narrow this morning," Simon remarked. "I remember I wanted to discuss the water drum mystery with you, and I couldn't get a chance to ride along beside you because the path wasn't wide enough."

"That's probably because the paths we came to later were only about six inches wide. You're getting more bold, that's all."

An African with a spear and an axe, stood by the edge of the track to let them pass.

"How about asking him the way, Charles?"

"I would if I could remember any Chibemba."

"Chibemba doesn't matter. Do the 'Englishman abroad' act. I'll do it myself. I'm bound to get some kind of answer." Simon turned round and went back.

"Mutende," said Simon as though he'd lived in the bush all his life.

"Mutende," said the hunter.

"Chiengi?" enquired Simon pointing down the road.

"Ee, Bwana," the hunter replied, smiling in agreement.

Charles then came along and pointed in exactly the opposite direction.

"Chiengi?" he enquired.

"Ee, Bwana," said the hunter again.

"You see what I mean, Simon. It's always a stranger you meet when you want to know the way. That happens in any country."

"Oh well, let's carry on. I expect I'm just imagining that we're on a different road."

Various tracks crossed the main one, and little paths branched out in different directions; but they tried to keep to the one which looked the most used.

"My watch says 'twenty to six'; and I think that must be about right," Charles said after a while. At this time of year there was very little twilight. The sun slid out of the sky and it was dark.

Simon got off his cycle. He said: "Charles, I don't like the look of things at all. Very soon we shall hardly be able to see at all. Let's admit it—we're lost."

"I wish I knew whether it would be better to go back. Listen! I think I can hear drumming in the direction we're going. That means there will be a village," Charles said, looking happier. "There will be people who can help us."

The two boys stopped to listen. There was definitely the sound of drums, quick and exciting. They were travelling the right way, at least.

"If only we had cycle lamps," Simon said. "I didn't even think of that when we started out, did you?" He got on his bike again and attempted to ride along in front of Charles.

"If only I knew a bit more about the stars, then I might be able to get home; but I only really know the Southern Cross," Charles confessed.

It was now so dark that it was difficult to keep to the path, and even more difficult to anticipate which way it would twist. Simon was wobbling along, doing his best to keep on his cycle, when something made him pull up quickly. Charles bumped into his back wheel.

"Thought I saw a snake; but it's only a piece of wood. I'm sorry to be so jittery," Simon said apologetically. After about half a mile of this uncertain travel, which would have been amusing had they not been in such a frightening predicament, Charles noticed a large slab of rock out-crop, round and inviting.

"I've never seen a rock that looked so comfortable," he said. "Let's get off and have a real rest. We don't seem to be any nearer that village. The drums are just as far away as ever."

Simon said something; but Charles was gazing fixedly away from him and didn't hear. Simon prodded Charles.

"It's no use day-dreaming in the middle of the night," he said.

Charles held up his hand and pointed to a tiny bead of pale yellow light, which wove its way through the dark shadows in the distance.

"Do you have fireflies here?" Simon asked.

"Yes, but they don't look like that!"

Simon watched in silence. The light, sometimes visible, at other times hidden, was certainly coming their way.

"It's probably the old hunter coming back," Simon whispered.

"He hadn't got a lamp."

The conversation ended there. The two boys stopped talking and watched the light silently approaching them. Charles said: "This must be a lamp because it's a yellow light and it's so near the ground. Only a hurricane lamp could be carried like that." The drums continued to thud away in the village which was hidden amongst the trees behind them.

"Perhaps this will be somebody who will help us. If he's got a lamp, he must have paraffin and things like that."

"I'd like to think you were right," Charles commented.

"I can't tell you why, but I don't believe this is help coming. Why all this noise on the one hand, and so much stealth on the other. A group of roistering Africans wouldn't be moving silently like that to the scene of a party." He waited a little while and then said: "Simon, look! It will be here in a moment. Stick your cycle under that bush. I'll do the same. Let's take cover. It's better to be on the safe side."

Charles mopped his forehead. He pulled Simon down

beside him into the thicket. There were few leaves on the wintry branches, but enough to keep them from immediate discovery. The light advanced, step by step. Simon felt rather sick; but didn't say a word. Even if he had said something Charles wouldn't have heard it because his heart, which had kept him company on so many escapades without intruding, was now pounding in his ears. First he squatted on his haunches. He had learned to sit like this from the Africans, when he was a very small boy. Now he couldn't sit like that for long. He forgot about any dangers there might be lurking in the undergrowth because of the one which he knew was approaching. He sat down on the ground and crouched amongst the grass.

Left! Right! The lamp swung slowly. It was near enough for them to realise that this was no silent approach. With each footfall there was a muffled rattle, like old leaves, or dry pods with the seeds still in them. At last the lamp was level with the two boys. It was carried by one, solitary figure. The dismal beam shone upwards to reveal the apparition that was carrying it.

The boys' first terrified glance took in the huge garters made from dried gourds, tied in rows of threes to the legs of this strange creature. For every gourd there was an even larger black shadow cast by the lamplight upon the next; but the garters were not fixed to any human figure. This grotesque and shambling creature seemed to be covered from head to foot with long, shaggy hair. It had an ape-like tail which curled upwards, like an elongated question mark back to front. It was no human hand that carried the lamp, for its long claws hung down from the wire handle like teeth on a miniature harrow.

Simon looked at Charles and wondered if his teeth were chattering too. Then he ducked down amongst the undergrowth as the creature stopped, on the alert—listening. But an evil force made him go on watching. He had forgotten to look at the face of this hatefu

monster. He glanced upwards. There was no face. There was a crude, elongated, wicked-looking mask, painted and streaked with red and white.

Left! Right! The lamp swung again from side to side as the figure shuffled off again. The boys could see its necklaces of teeth and bones which made a devil's tattoo with each movement of the wearer. It went slowly by towards the village.

After a while Simon got up. He was stiff and shaking. "Whew!" Charles whistled between his teeth. "That's the old witch doctor—no doubt about that!"

They stood for a moment trying to decide once again, in whispered conference, what to do.

"No good trying to go to the village now," Charles said. "I'd like to see what happens, though," he added in a more cheerful voice.

They looked about them and got their cycles out of the bushes. Further down the path, on what was probably the fringe of the village, they saw a large sturdy tree. It was a good deal taller than the others round about.

"Do you think we can climb that?" Charles asked, doubtfully.

"Depends on how you can reach the first fork in the trunk. There's nothing to grip until you get up there." He gave it a brief but expert look.

"I know, let's use one of the bikes for a ladder. You go up first and I'll hold it up against the trunk. Then I'll prop the cycle up again, and use it as a ladder myself," Charles said, for he had now recovered from surprise and was afraid only that he might miss something interesting. Standing on the saddle, Simon could just reach the lower branches and was able to clamber up into the tree where Charles quickly joined him. Presently, when they had regained their breath sufficiently to talk in whispers Charles said: "Things could be worse, Simon. We've got a good tree. Up here we are out of the way of ants, wild animals and the witch doctor."

“Wasn’t he a frightful looking creature,” gasped Simon.

From where they sat, they could see into the village where grey shapes moved about in the firelight. They could just catch a glimpse of people standing up and shuffling their feet in a kind of dance. The sound of drumming was louder now, and quicker. After a while the tall, vile creature which had passed so near the two boys, emerged from a dilapidated hut. He too began to dance.

They sat in silence watching the grim parade. Neither of them was now frightened; but it was very cold.

“Charles,” whispered Simon, “I’ve got pins and needles in my leg.”

“Well, kick it about in the air. We certainly can’t get down now. Far too risky—here we must stay, I’m afraid.”

“How about thinking up lists of our favourite food?” Simon said. “It would be one way to keep awake.”

“Ten days from now—it takes ten days to hatch out—we’ll be shaking from head to foot with malaria,” Charles said in a sepulchral whisper. “We’re sure to get bitten by mosquitoes tonight. We won’t want any food at all then.”

“One thing in favour of malaria is that we shall, at least, be in bed.” Miserably, Simon tried to find a more comfortable place in the tree.

CHAPTER VIII

Jennifer and Aileen spy a Stranger

JENNIFER thought how much she would have enjoyed going on tour with Uncle Peter and the two boys. She was disappointed at being left behind with Aileen, who seemed to her to be so lazy. "Fancy being too lazy to go out for a walk unless you have to get yourself from one place to another," Jennifer said.

"I get tired, and I like to play with Sooty," was Aileen's reply.

"Do you think Sooty would agree to taking a little walk by the edge of the lake?"

Aileen thought for a moment; and then she noticed that Jennifer was laughing at her. "I think Sooty could just manage to go a short way," she said, bowing solemnly to Jennifer. "I'll go and fetch Her Royal Highness, 'Princess Sooty.'"

The two cousins, the best of friends, went off. They were followed by the little black cat, who pranced along, sometimes far behind, but never losing sight of them. "I think Sooty's better than any dog and far more fun to take out because she is more interested in real things and not so interested in smells as dogs are. I like taking Sooty for walks." Aileen looked at her pet with pride.

They passed an African with a basket, who stood and gazed at Sooty in astonishment.

"Chinshi? What is that?" he asked.

"It's a pussy," Aileen told him; but she used the local pronunciation which sounded like "Pooshie."

"Mwa!" He made an exclamation of astonishment and disbelief. "Fancy," he thought, "A 'pooshie' going for a walk. Europeans *are* peculiar about animals."

"What have you got in that basket?" Aileen asked him. He had the contents covered with an old sack, which glistened with salt crystals. They looked like dew-drops on a piece of broken bark.

"Fish. I sell it. I go away on my bicycle and get a good price for it. Next year I shall drive a lorry with fish, down to the towns on the Copperbelt."

Aileen noticed that he was well dressed. He was wearing a flashy new shirt of black and red checked flannel. She thought he seemed familiar. She thought if she talked to him she might remember where she had seen him before.

"You must be very rich to buy a lorry," she said.

"I work very hard, Mama, now for five years." He smiled at them and went on his way.

"Shalenipo—Goodbye!"

"Kafikenipo!" replied Aileen.

The two girls wished they could go out in a boat. It was terribly disappointing that the one for which they had brought a new engine hadn't arrived. The boat was to be towed round to Chiengi and in the meantime a forsaken looking crate marked 'Marine Engine' stood in one of the Boma stores.

"I do think it's dull not being able to sail," said Aileen.

"Let's go home."

"Do you think Uncle Peter could send a message to ask them to hurry with the boat?"

"I'm sure he could. Let's remind him. We'll do it now if he's back."

Uncle Peter returned to Chiengi about five. The rest of the family, who had had tea earlier, watched him having his tea and asked the day's news.

"I think the best thing about today was an African I came across called 'Smell Mulenga,' a frightful looking villain, he was too. He was said to have set light to someone's hut, and the rest of the village were furious with him."

"What a wonderful name," Jennifer said. "Do you think he knew what the word 'smell' really meant?"

"He may have done. They choose the most curious names at times. We've known people called 'Pencil', and another called 'Table Saucer'. 'Nchinga' is another favourite name—meaning bicycle."

"I can see the point of being called 'Nchinga,' Daddy, because you see," Aileen said, "they are such useful things and we all need them in the bush."

"Yes, I agree there is some point in that; but I would much prefer them to keep their own African names. They change their names too, and just when you've got used to a chap whose name is Banda, you find letters addressed to 'Mr. Jet Propelled, Esquire,' which are for him. Very muddling."

Auntie Kay smiled and said that at any rate it showed that they read the newspapers.

"By the way, what time did Charles and Simon get back?"

"Get back?" Auntie Kay said, in great surprise. "Why I've got their tea waiting for them and I took it for granted they were following you, with some of the other people."

"We haven't seen them," Jennifer and Aileen said in chorus.

Uncle Peter got up and went out to ask if anyone had seen the two young Bwanas, with the clerk who was acting as their guide. They shook their heads. No, they had not been seen since they set off for home about two o'clock that afternoon. Was there any sign of the clerk? No!

"Peter, what can they be up to? It's nearly half past

five and it will soon be getting dark. Are you sure the guide was reliable? I'm not frightened of the bush, but I do get anxious when things like this happen."

"I quite expected they'd be back in about an hour and a half—they weren't walking like the rest of us," Uncle Peter said.

"I'll go down and see if they're somewhere on the lake shore. Perhaps they've got some scheme on, and didn't bother to return to the house for tea." Jennifer was anxious to see them secretly, so that they could talk about plans for the night. She felt quite sure that the mysterious African would return because he'd been looking so hard for something and was so frightened when the bullfrog made a noise.

In a short while she came back, and shook her head. There was no sign of them. By this time Uncle Peter had asked everyone. They all said the same thing—that surely the two young Bwanas had reached Chiengi hours ago.

"I'm really terribly worried, now that it's getting dark," Auntie Kay said. She looked upset and her voice sounded frightened.

"Quite honestly, Kay, so am I. I've just had a look at the map to see if that would tell me where they're likely to be. Lazalo! Cookie! Call the messengers. We shall have to organize search parties for them."

Lazalo and Cookie came back in a few moments with as many searchers as they could find. Those who had them, were carrying spears and hoes. Some had hurricane lamps or torches.

Uncle Peter explained to each little group which section of the bush he wanted them to go over. "When you've looked thoroughly, come back and we can try again elsewhere. Kay, I shall have to leave you here with the two girls, and I'll get one of the messengers to stay with you as a guard. The one who's had a touch of fever had better stay. He can keep the fires stoked and do anything else you may require. It won't hurt him to be pottering around

but I don't think he should go searching in the bush in the cold."

"I'd rather come, Peter; but I do see that someone's got to stay at home. I'll keep a hot meal waiting for you all. I do hope you won't be long—not because I mind being left here," she added, "but because I shall worry so, until I see those wretched boys safely home again."

There was a knock on the front door. A bicycle dropped against the wall. There was a sound of shoes on the doorstep. "Thank goodness! Well, that is a relief," sighed Auntie Kay. "I'm really furious with those two for giving us all a fright like this. Why on earth don't they come in?" She went over and opened the door "Too ashamed of themselves, I suppose."

She opened the door wide. "Well, what have you two got to say . . . ?" but her voice trailed off. "Oh, come in," she said quietly.

The clerk who had acted as guide was standing in the doorway. His white suit was grubby and crumpled. He seemed dreadfully tired. He looked at Uncle Peter, who saw how tired and ill he looked and asked him to sit down. "Well?"

"Bwana, they didn't wait for me," he said. "So I started off for Chiengi thinking I would catch them up. Then I met an old man who said he'd seen them going another way, so I went back, almost to Mulenga's village. But I didn't see them at all." The poor man was trembling, and he put his head in his hands.

Uncle Peter said quietly: "Just you tell me exactly where you saw them last, and what the old man said to you." Uncle Peter went off with his little search party to start looking from there.

Aileen and Jennifer had their supper together and were sent off to bed, leaving Auntie Kay knitting by the lamp light.

"I didn't notice the lumps in my bed last night," Aileen said to Jennifer.

"Nor did I," she replied, "and I don't remember seeing all these bats floating around."

"Well, don't look up into the roof then. I try to keep my eyes closed, and if I open them, I look down on to my covers."

Jennifer asked her if she had told anyone about the secret searcher of last night.

"Of course not! That would be silly. I want to go and watch for him again tonight; but I don't see how we can get across the sitting room, with Mummy there, listening for every sound."

"I know what we'll do. We'll try not to make any noise; but if we do, and Auntie Kay notices, we'll say we've gone to call Sooty in because we thought we heard her crying at the bathroom window."

"I'd like to get Sooty in anyway. I don't like leaving her out at night in the bush."

They lay quietly in bed for what seemed a very long time. Then Jennifer said she couldn't stay awake any more, and if she didn't get up then she'd probably sleep till morning. So the two girls put on their dressing gowns and pushed their feet into bedroom slippers. The floor was far too broken for them to want to walk on bare feet. Aileen put her hand on the door handle, but it was old and ill-fitting. It rattled. So she turned it gently and then pushed the door open with her hand. It had warped a bit, and grated over the cement floor.

Across the way, the bathroom door stood open. There was a bright rectangle of moonlight on the floor, like some ghostly bathmat. It seemed a long way to go without disturbing Auntie Kay.

Jennifer looked towards the lamp-light. Auntie Kay sat facing the front door. She was reading a book opened out on the arm of her chair, and she was knitting. Jennifer felt that if she could have done three things at once, her aunt would be doing so now to stop herself from worrying. The two girls tip-toed across the big room and into the

bathroom. It was easy to be quiet when there were so many louder noises. A large bat swooped past them and up again, into the rafters.

For a few minutes they sat on the edge of the bath but it was cold and uncomfortable. Aileen, who was shorter than Jennifer soon tired of this. She crossed the room and leaned up against the wall, out of the moonlight, but where she could see into the yard. Jennifer went up to the window and knelt down so that only her eyes were above the level of the window ledge. A shuffling sound came from the yard.

"He must wear shoes ten sizes too big for him," Aileen said to herself. Then she realized it wasn't the sound of feet after all, but cycle wheels on the dry ground. They could see the spokes shining in the moonlight as the man propped it up against a tree. The intruder wore a checked shirt like the man the night before. He came across the yard and looked to see if there was any fire. It was out. He began to scratch at one of the bricks at the bottom of the right-hand pillar.

"I think he's a dagga smoker," Aileen said.

"Whatever is that?"

"I don't really know; but it's something that grows here and some of the Africans smoke it. He probably keeps it there because it's dry and he can get a light from the fire."

"But you forget there isn't usually a fire there. Why should he be so sly about it all, when the house is usually empty?"

"Perhaps he stays in the house when it's empty. We could ask someone, I suppose. But then we'd have to tell."

They watched carefully. He pulled a brick out. They noticed it was one of the four bottom bricks of the right hand pillar. He put his hand into the little space it had left.

"He certainly must hide something there. I'm beginning to think you are right about the dagga, Aileen. I'm not

quite sure, though, that it makes sense. Why hide the stuff?"

The African put the brick back, brushing the sandy soil flat with the palm of his hand. He made sure the brick was in its place and not sticking out. He stood up, slowly. Most of his body was in the shade, but a beam of moonlight shone on his face and they could see him more clearly. His back was turned so Jennifer and Aileen pressed close to the window. He was, without a doubt, somebody they had seen before.

"Of course—how stupid of me. That checked shirt!" Jennifer's whisper was almost a squeak. "We met him today when we were out with Sooty."

"Perhaps that's where he keeps the money for his new lorry," Aileen whispered, rather loudly because she was excited. "But that would be silly too. In any case you couldn't put much money in there, when the brick's put back. Not enough to buy a lorry, anyway. They usually save their money in half-crowns because the ants eat paper money. Up here they can't put it in the Bank like the Africans in the towns do."

"It must take a frightful lot of half-crowns to buy a lorry," Jennifer said, trying to do a sum in her head and then imagining what so many half-crowns would look like.

"Daddy says it sometimes takes two people to carry the suitcase full of money, when they go out to buy something very expensive like a car."

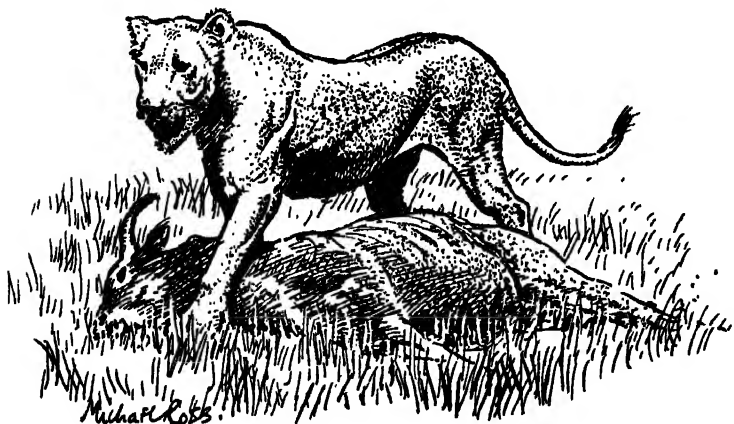
Aileen felt warm fur rubbing itself against her ankles. It was Sooty saying she wanted to go to bed and that it was cold and late. Aileen picked Sooty up and she purred and rubbed the tip of her nose along Aileen's chin. Then she rubbed the side of her face against Aileen's cheek.

"Darling Sooty—you're so cosy," Aileen whispered into her pink-lined ears, thinking what beautiful fur Sooty had, and quite the finest set of whiskers in Africa.

Jennifer watched Auntie Kay carefully, in case she

noticed them. She sat quite still as though listening for footsteps. She sighed and picked up her knitting. Then the mechanical, clicking sound began again. The knitting needles made a noise like one of those tiresome, busy little clocks that tell you when to get up on a cold morning.

It was very cold. The two girls slipped into their room, and leaving the creaking door open, they got into bed and were soon fast asleep.



CHAPTER IX

The Two Boys Discover a Witch Doctor

IT was a long time since Simon had felt homesick, but sitting on his branch under a ceiling of rustling leaves and a roof of twinkling stars he wondered how he could stay awake, and alive, till morning. He wondered whether he'd be lost for ever in the bush. He pictured all kinds of ways in which he could be-rescued. His uncle might arrive with the Boma truck, for instance. Somebody might come hurrying up on a motor bicycle. No, he hadn't seen any motor cycles, so help wouldn't come that way. Staying awake was fairly easy because of the icy cold wind. He could put one shoulder against the tree and protect it from the blast, but then the other half of him was exposed. The breeze got inside his shirt and filled it like the sails of a ship. Simon thought how curious it was that people should talk of Africa as a hot country. It was only in the very middle of the day that he had felt completely warm. Two or three blankets were what he needed. In fact, one blanket which he could wrap round himself would be better than nothing. This would make him look like an African, if he wrapped it round the right way. They were very sensible really, in the way they did this. Simon began to rub his arms and legs. That was one way to keep his circulation going.

Charles was shifting from one place to another. He did his best not to shake the branches, it would be fatal to

draw attention to themselves now. He groped round for a good foothold, so that he could raise himself up even further. He was determined to see what was going on in the village.

He bent over and whispered to Simon: "People come to Africa from all parts of the world, in the hope of seeing this kind of thing, and here we are, with ringside seats."

"I'm too cold to share in your excitement, Charles. I'm too cold to think of anything but fires and hot water bottles and lovely hot meals."

"There are beautiful fires in the village below us. Look, they're just putting on some more logs!"

Sparks like squadrons of fireflies, shot upwards and then faded. Here and there a spark of greater range sailed about in the upward rush of smoke, till it too, became dull and the tiny hole it had cut in the darkness was once again smoothed away by the unyielding hand of night.

The village drums rattled out like the sound of gunfire. Faster and faster came the drum beats. More and more people joined the shuffling, rhythmic dance. The sound had an hypnotic effect. Simon felt himself slowly slipping, his head bent forward.

He grasped hold of a branch. "Charles," he whispered, "we simply must go on talking, even if it's only in whispers. I so nearly fell asleep and tumbled off my perch."

"Look, Simon! You can't go to sleep now. That last lot of firewood has caught alight and we can see into the village clearly. It's a pretty ragged village. Those look more like grass shelters than proper huts. It probably isn't a village at all. That will make it all the more difficult for Daddy to find us. It is a cunning thing to do, if you consider it, to come to a place that probably isn't on the map at all. It can't be a properly registered village because grass huts aren't allowed in a permanent village."

"They do look a bit decayed, don't they? Look over to the right. Do you see the people making a half circle now?"

The boys watched the witch⁷ doctor move out from the shadows. They had not seen him before. The unwinking moonlight on the one side made the drama look supernatural, timeless, icy. The firelight showed a different picture—turbulent, riotous, infernal.

"I hadn't noticed that the moon was up," Simon remarked. "The old witch doctor times his entry very well."

"They study every possible trick to make themselves terrifying. Some of them take courses in divining, and pay a lot of money to some supposedly powerful witch doctor in return for lessons."

"I think this one must have had a very good tutor," Simon whispered in a drowsy voice.

A fresh note was added to the turmoil. It was in a different key from the penetrating yet muted sound of drumming and hand-clapping. It was a series of notes that Charles and Simon could understand. Slowly it dawned on them that it was the music of a brass band! A rather rusty, tarnished band and one which had given up all hope of keeping in time. The two boys looked about them. They thought they heard some movement nearby; but a brass band approaching would make more disturbance than just a rustling of leaves and the crack of a twig.

They each went higher up the tree. The branches were more fragile. "Look out," said Charles to himself. "It won't hold us if we go further up. It's probably an old tree and brittle. Maybe that accounts for the sound I heard just now."

The scene of dancing and barbarity amazed and horrified them. The witch doctor was now standing right out in a patch of moonlight. He looked several feet taller than the people attending him. He no longer carried his hurricane lamp, but was shaking rattles of palm fronds and clappers made from large dried gourds. Simon could understand how these simple people could be terrified into complete subjection. He was scared stiff

himself. "Scared stiff," he repeated. Then he pulled himself together. "Stiff with cold, of course," he whispered aloud, as though to contradict his previous thought.

The brass band started again, somewhere about half way through their tune. It was a very careless bandmaster that allowed such a performance. Sometimes the band hurried, and Simon could picture the short, quick comic steps of some ancient cinema film. Then the band would slow down, dawdling, as though leading a crippled army reluctantly on parade.

But Simon and Charles forgot about the invisible band. They were too busy watching the witch doctor's frenzied dance. Then they looked at each other and laughed. "Shh," Charles said, "we can't afford to be discovered now."

"Well, you laughed too, Charles. I do think it's funny having the music as well. It's completely out of gear. Could it be an old gramophone?"

"I can't help thinking I should know that tune."

"Of course, I've got it! We all know the tune. I'd have had a name for it ages ago if it had been played properly. Listen. 'Some talk of Alex-ander, and-some-of Hercu-es'," Simon beat out the verse with his foot.

Charles held up his hand and shook his head. "Don't start singing now, Simon. I can hear those nearby bushes rattling again. It's not the wind. Too spasmodic," he warned.

Simon listened. He whispered back, "It's someone coming towards us. He's coming from the way we came. Perhaps it's a second witch doctor. I do hope he doesn't see our bikes lying there on the ground. That would give the show away."

"Cheer up. It might be Daddy with a search party. That would make this old barbarian of a witch doctor pack up and run."

It was difficult, from where the two boys were sitting, to see through the leaves on the far side of the tree, where

it was shaded from the moonlight. There was no doubt now, in their minds, about someone's approach. Stealthily the two boys moved out along their respective branches. They felt anxious and all interest in the village was now eclipsed by the immediate danger beneath them. They would be less conspicuous if they were not too close together.

A few moments later a nearby bush began to shake violently. Something emerged and crept under their tree. They could hear it breathing. Charles gripped his branch firmly and then bent down to try to see what this was. He saw a hand feel its way towards the tree trunk. It was a white hand.

Charles beckoned to Simon, who slipped down again to the fork in the tree where he had sat for so long. He looked down on their solitary visitor. There was no question of his being a member of a rescue party. He was a complete stranger. Simon had a better look. "Was he a stranger?" he thought. The man wore glasses. He had a beard. "What a curious creature to see in the bush in the middle of the night," Simon whispered to himself. He looked questioningly at Charles, who shrugged his shoulders. He did not recognise the man.

Simon wished he could remember why this man looked familiar. He wore an open necked shirt, and a funny grey pullover, which looked as though it had been made for him when he was a very small boy. On his feet—sandals! "Beard, glasses, sandals," whispered Simon, as though calling over an inventory.

"Of course I've seen him before," he said to Charles. "He's that curious character who came off the plane with us at Kasama." Simon was excited now. He talked louder and was reminded of it by Charles.

Simon went on: "Let's drop him a note, and find out what he's doing here. Perhaps he'll help us. Perhaps we should warn him about the witch doctor first, then he'll know we're friendly. We can find out like that

whether he's friend or foe too. If we're wrong, then we can stay up the tree. On a night like this I don't trust anybody."

Charles felt in various pockets and finally produced a small stub of pencil. "Not a lot of good without something to write on," he thought. His first feelings of excitement were now giving way to disappointment. There was nothing he could find that would do. Simon also, was turning his pockets inside out; but all he found was one of those curious Rhodesian pennies, with a hole through the centre so that they can be threaded on a string. He put his hand in his hip pocket. Of course; when it got dark he had rolled his hat up and stuck it in this pocket. He took out the hat; but there was nothing in this pocket either. There seemed to be nothing to write on at all. They would have to think of some other method of sounding out this man.

Simon ran his hand over the hat, and began to roll it up again. Then he remembered that weeks ago he'd stuck a paper bus ticket under the ribbon. It was one of those long, paper things with faint, gingery printing on it. He unrolled it and found that it was only printed on the one side.

"Here you are, Charles, write on this!" They saw that the stranger was peering through the bushes into the village. "Don't let him go off. He's called Dr. Foster, I'm quite certain that's his name."

The man was quite oblivious of any strange movements in the tree, neither had he noticed the cycles lying nearby. He was completely fascinated by what he saw taking place in the village.

The two boys had a hurried discussion. They wondered how best to convey their warning. It was rather like drafting a telegram. There was so little you could put on the back of an old, curled up, bus ticket.

"How about: 'Keep out of this village if you value your life.' That would do, Charles."

"Far too long. We've got to tell him about ourselves as well."

"Then how about saying 'Beware of witch doctor,' or something of that sort?"

Charles tried to sharpen the pencil with his thumb nail. "Yes, let's say 'Beware.'" He went on muttering to himself. Then he looked up with pride.

He said: "How's this for a message:

'Cave! We are lost. Can you help us. C. Plender.' "

Simon looked at it critically. "You've left out the question mark; otherwise it's very good. But how can we get it down to him? It's far too light and it will sail about like a dead leaf."

"It will make it heavier if we wrap it around your penny," Charles replied. •

After a bit of wriggling, Simon managed to find a gap where there was a clear drop through the branches. Then he let the penny go. He watched the man beneath clutch his chest in terrified surprise.

"I believe I got it right inside his shirt," Simon thought to himself. "Now we shall see if I'm right. I think he'll help us. If we're wrong and this man's no good, it will frighten him away. He'll think it's one of the witch doctor's tricks."

The bearded stranger put his hand inside his shirt and took out the small roll of paper. He began to unwrap the penny. Breathlessly, the two boys watched every movement. He opened up the piece of paper and glanced at it. As he did so, he looked up.

CHAPTER X

Simon and Charles are Rescued

THE two boys held their breath and watched the man, with the note in his hand, turning round with his back to the moonlight, the better to see the writing. It was certainly bright, but not quite as good as daylight for reading pencilled notes. He came back and leaned up against the trunk of the tree. He took out a cigarette lighter. They could see him twisting the wheel to make it spark.

"He's going to burn it, Charles," Simon whispered. They looked again and by the light of the flame, the man started reading. He tried to shade the flame from the wind with the palm of his hand. He had some difficulty in doing this and holding out, at the same time, the shrivelled piece of paper he was attempting to read.

After a moment or two, he turned the note over and glanced at the printed side. He stepped out and looked round him. Then he walked round and saw the two cycles lying where they had fallen as the boys dropped them when they climbed the tree.

The efforts which he made to try and see who had sent him the note made the boys realise that this man would help them. So, silently they slipped down to the first fork in the tree trunk. It was not more than six or seven feet above the ground. The stranger took off his glasses and blinked as though he could not believe what he saw through them. He peered at the two boys as though he wished to verify what he saw with a naked eye. Then he grinned at the boys and indicated his shoulder with a pat of his

hand. "Step on here," he seemed to say, "and I'll help you down without making too much commotion."

"Thank you, Sir," whispered Charles politely as he slid on to the ground and waited for Simon. Simon was just a little shorter than Charles, which made jumping down more difficult for him. When he got down, Simon raised his hands above his head and performed some knee-bending exercises. He explained that this was not some outlandish greeting to their rescuer, but because he had become so very stiff up there in the tree. In the half-darkness, with his rolled hat sticking out of his hip pocket like tail feathers, Simon reminded his cousin of a picture he'd seen of a dodo flapping its wings. Charles wanted to laugh, partly because he was so glad to be on the ground again, and chiefly because Simon looked so funny. However, he knew that they must not draw attention to themselves—not that the witch doctor would hear—but because there might be some stray person in the vicinity who would raise an alarm.

Simon looked at their rescuer and was in no doubt about his identity. He was longing to ask him how it was that he too should be on the outskirts of the witch doctor's village; but this did not seem the time for that kind of conversation. He looked more friendly than he had been in the aircraft. Somehow, after a week or two in the African bush, curious clothes didn't seem eccentric any more. After all, Simon and Charles didn't look so very much like English schoolboys at this particular moment.

Dr. Foster beckoned to the boys to follow him. He walked along the very edge of the path, keeping in the shade of the bushes. Simon and Charles followed behind, but as they were not walking on a well worn track their shoes made a crunching noise on the dry sticks and leaves. It was because Simon was trying so hard not to make any sound, that he noticed how Dr. Foster moved along in complete silence. It was the sandals of course. With their rubber soles, they were as quiet as the bare feet of an



'Dr. Foster turned and w



‘Towards Uncle Peter.’

[see page 92.]

African stalking game. He had thick woollen socks on now, and Simon thought how glad Jennifer would be to know this because she had been so worried to think of him trudging through the bush, a prey to leeches. What curious notions people had about Africa. He had been sure that each time you put a foot down you would bring it up covered from knee to toe with these disgusting creatures. He wondered what they really looked like, for he hadn't seen any at all.

They must have walked like this for about half a mile for they reached the point where, yesterday, the path had widened and they had been able to cycle along side by side. A little off the main path, with the near-side wheels right up into the grass, was a Landrover. It had some white lettering on the door, where most vehicles showed what department or firm they belonged to. Simon could read it now. "International Red Locust Organization," it said and underneath was the word 'Abercorn.'

"My father mentioned yesterday morning that some people from Abercorn were coming through; but he didn't say who was coming. Simon, my cousin here tells me that you are Dr. Foster, because you arrived in Kasama by the same 'plane as he did." Charles had started by speaking in whispers, but as he got more excited he quite forgot to be quiet. In any case, there seemed no longer any reason for talking in hushed voices.

"Yes, that's perfectly correct. I am Dr. Foster. So now you know all about me; but what do I know about you? There's one thing I can guess—that you're supposed to be at home and asleep and that your parents must be very worried people."

"It's like this," Simon said, "We set out on ulendo with my uncle this morning—well, yesterday morning now—but we set off home before him, with a guide, and lost our way."

"You seem to have lost the guide too. Where is he?"

"Yes, we did miss him; but that wasn't altogether his

fault. In fact, we can't really blame anyone but ourselves." Then Simon added: "But if we hadn't got lost, we'd never have seen darkest Africa at work in the way we've done this evening."

"Our bikes—we've left them behind," said Charles. "What a frightful nuisance. I can't believe we'll ever find them again."

"Don't bother about that. You get up into the back of the car, both of you. You'll find some blankets and a pillow in there. I'll wake my driver up and we'll go back for the cycles for you. It will be a good excuse to have another look at that old rogue prancing round in all his finery before the villagers. By the way, you must both be very hungry." They climbed into the back of the Land-rover and sat on the floor.

"And thirsty," said the two boys. "We can at least be sure we haven't caught dysentery because we haven't seen any water at all, let alone been tempted to drink it unboiled."

"We left our water sack with the guide," Simon explained.

"I've got a tin of sausages in there somewhere. Can you see it, Simon? There's a tin opener too, some biscuits and a bottle with butter in it. That's right. Now you two sit there and have a good meal, and the driver and I will go back for your bikes. I think it's better to get them now. We don't want to leave any traces. The villagers may warn the witch doctor, if they think they've been observed and then the District Commissioner will have endless trouble finding him again. Once we get back with our information, he'll be able to make his plans."

"I know my father's very anxious to get this fellow," Charles said. "He's been terrifying the Africans for miles around. We first heard of him a week or so ago, when someone from round here wrote and complained of his activities."

"Well, I won't be long. The driver and I will probably

ride the cycles back part of the way. I'll take a torch along to use as a light once we are well away from the village." So the two of them set off, leaving Simorl and Charles, who were more than ready for the meal which Dr. Foster had provided for them.

Very soon afterwards the boys were asleep. They were too tall to stretch out full length, but managed by curling up their legs, to get quite comfortable. However much they had to fold themselves up, this was luxury compared with sitting in a tree all night and they slept quite soundly. They had no idea how long they slept; but it took them quite a few minutes before they realised that Dr. Foster was back again and telling them to wake up.

"I'm sorry to have to do it, but there just isn't room," he said, "You'll have to sit up I'm afraid, for the journey home, otherwise I can't get your bikes on the back." However, they didn't mind waking up in the least, and felt quite ready to meet any fresh adventures which they might encounter on the way home.

Dr. Foster was just about to get into the car beside the driver, when in the headlights of the car, three figures were seen coming towards them along the path. Dr. Foster made some remark about the bush being rather crowded at night, so Charles peered over the driving seat to have a look.

"Well, this means that we're rescued twice over. Here's my father and some messengers. Dr. Foster, do you think you could speak to him first and tell him about the witch doctor? It's not that I'm in the least afraid of him—he'd hate that—but I quite expect him to be a bit annoyed."

The driver switched the headlights off and Dr. Foster turned and walked towards Uncle Peter. This was more than the two boys could bear to sit and watch, so they jumped out and ran along to greet the District Commissioner, who stood and gazed in complete astonishment at the little group of people in front of him.

When Uncle Peter burst out laughing, Simon knew that it was going to be all right. There wasn't a lot that could be said anyway, and he for one, would never give a guide the slip again. He didn't suppose that Charles would, either. That was one of the things he'd noticed about Africa. It all looked quite friendly on the surface, but the people who knew the country well had tremendous respect for the bush and never took unnecessary chances. Risks were run only by greenhorns and schoolboys.

"I intended spending tonight in the back of my car and calling on you tomorrow morning, Mr. Plender," said the man in sandals. "My name's Foster, from the Locust Organization at Abercorn."

"I had a note about you yesterday in my mail from Mporokoso. It didn't say who was coming, of course, but that we could expect some of your people through. However, what does surprise me is to see my nephew and my son with you."

Dr. Foster laughed and said that nothing astonished him more, either, and that this had indeed been a night of surprises. "They fell out of a tree more or less on the top of me," he added.

Uncle Peter thought the most important thing was to get back, and then hear the story at home. Dr. Foster offered to give them all a lift. They could take three in front, and he supposed it was possible to get Uncle Peter's messengers in the back with the boys and cycles. Although travelling was not so comfortable, it was remarkable how much could be loaded into one of these, apparently small, vehicles.

Charles and Simon, by unspoken agreement, left Dr. Foster to do the talking. He explained to Uncle Peter how he'd been looking for somewhere to spend the night, before going to see them at Chiengi. He had decided to park the Landrover and take a look round on foot. His intention had been to sleep on the edge of a village, if the people looked friendly. What he thought curious about

the particular village which he looked at was the fact that the bush went right up to the edge of the huts, and there was no sign of cultivation or of trees having been cut, neither were there any clearings for cassava gardens.

"There was just bush, and then a collection of ragged looking huts like some kind of temporary settlement. So I was able to get close up, under cover of trees and bushes," he continued.

"We had a wonderful view of it," Simon chipped in, no longer able to contain his share of the tale. "They were prancing round beating drums. They had huge fires and believe it or not, there was an old gramophone going too."

"Yes, I thought I heard a gramophone," said Dr. Foster. "It started up when the old witch doctor began his particular dance but it seemed so incongruous in the middle of so much primitive carry-on."

Uncle Peter said that witch doctors were prepared to use anything that would add to the mystery of their powers. He was interested that the witch doctor should have a gramophone because it showed that he had money, which must surely be evidence of the fact that he was making a business out of divinings or some similar roguery.

"Not at all the kind of night I'd expect to have in the bush," Dr. Foster said. "Can you imagine my surprise when Simon and Charles dropped out of a tree, literally on top of me?"

The story of the night's adventure was told to Uncle Peter in little bursts of excitement. However, the car soon reached Chiengi and drove up to the front door which had already been opened by Auntie Kay, knitting in hand. She looked so terribly anxious that Simon and Charles both felt more than ashamed of themselves as they jumped out to greet her.

"Mummy, I'm so very sorry. I do believe you've been crying," said Charles. "I'm very ashamed that we gave the guide the slip. It was all our fault; but we certainly won't do a thing like that again. It's much too frightening."

Auntie Kay looked at Simon's white face, and thought that perhaps they had been sufficiently punished already. She told them to come inside quickly and get themselves warmed by the fire. Simon and Charles took her, each by the arm, and they marched into the house as happily as though they'd returned from walking along a country lane. Then Uncle Peter brought Dr. Foster into the house too. He blinked as he looked into the lamp light, and then tapped his pocket with his right hand.

"My glasses," he said, "No wonder I can't see anything. It isn't surprising that I had a lot of trouble finding their bicycles in the grass either! I took them off to look at Simon and Charles sitting in their tree, because I thought my glasses were playing tricks on me. I can see very little without them really, but I wanted to be quite certain that I wasn't the victim of some optical illusion."

"Simon and Charles in a tree?" Auntie Kay said this in utter astonishment, as though in a crazy world this was just taking fantasy a little too far.

"They have had the most exciting adventures, Kay; and most important of all we've located the old witch doctor. I say 'we' have found him; but that is nonsense, of course. Charles and Simon saw him first and then Dr. Foster. In fact, that is how they all met."

"I don't know when I've had such an anxious time, Dr. Foster, and I do thank you for getting Simon and Charles safely home. All I hope is that the various rescue parties will return safely so that we can settle down for what remains of the night."

The sound of voices brought two sleepy-looking girls to the door of their bedroom. They whispered together and in a few moments came out to join the party. Nobody took any notice of them, so they both sat down on one of the folding chairs in a far corner of the room to listen to the talk that was going on between the others. However, Jennifer soon discovered that these chairs were not designed for two people, so she perched herself on the arm,

leaving the seat for Aileen and Sooty. Neither of them noticed the stranger at first. It was only when she heard Uncle Peter say: "And what are your plans for the next few days, Dr. Foster?" that she realised that here was the curious man she had seen on the 'plane which brought them to Kasama. So many unexpected things had happened to them since then, that Jennifer accepted the fact that by some mysterious means Dr. Foster had arrived at Chiengi and now looked as though he were joining their party.

"As you know," he said, "I'm up here looking for locust breeding grounds; but I have several days local leave in hand and I'm a bit ahead of schedule, so I would very much like to stay here for a few days and see what happens to the witch doctor. Best of all, I'd like to join in the hunt."

"And we would welcome your help," Uncle Peter replied. "As a matter of fact, I don't want to waste any time at all and propose to make plans at once, and I shall start out sometime tomorrow."

Simon and Charles went across to the two girls and began to tell them about their exciting evening. Presently Auntie Kay, who had gone to the kitchen, returned with cups of hot soup for everyone, and the good news that all the search parties had now returned.

"Do you think we can tell Dr. Foster about our adventures tonight, Aileen?" Jennifer asked. Her aunt overheard this and said: "How can you have had any adventures? You went to bed quite early and slept like logs." Both girls laughed and said that even so, they'd been sleep-walking and had had quite a lively time.

"I think he's a very fine person," Charles said. "He was very good to us, and what is more, he didn't get excited like so many grown-ups would do, when we dropped a note down to him from our hiding-place in the tree. You could tell, by the way he went about things, that he was used to unexpected things happening."

"He could probably help us to solve our mystery," Simon said. "He may be able to guess what the African's looking for under the water tank."

"And help us catch him and bring him to justice," Aileen added. This made the other children laugh at her.

"How do you know he's breaking any laws, Aileen?" "Only criminals are brought to justice," Simon said.

"Well, I think he is a criminal, Simon. He looked so frightened and kept peering round about him as though he might be found out at any moment."

"Yes, I think Aileen's right," agreed Jennifer with a nod. "Especially after watching him this evening. Anyone just coming to get a light from the fire wouldn't behave like this man did tonight."

Dr. Foster was completely absorbed in his story of the dancing in the village, and the way the witch-doctor had been dressed, all hung about with rattles and bones. Uncle Peter sat there, listening and asking questions.

"I think the four of you over there are being far too slow with that soup," Auntie Kay remarked. "It's high time you finished it and went off to bed."

"It's hot, Mummy," Aileen said, "and you don't like us to blow on things to cool them off." But Auntie Kay had turned to the other discussion between Uncle Peter and Dr. Foster.

"There's just one thing that strikes me, about our water tank friend, and it's this," Charles said, fishing the vegetables out of the soup with a spoon, "If he's looking for something important, he must be expecting somebody to put it there; but we haven't seen any other strangers about. Who has been around there? Well, the fire lighter, the water carriers and the garden boy. We shall have to keep an eye on them; but I think if they were going to hide something away, they've had plenty of opportunity to do so. I think we must watch carefully for the arrival of a different African altogether. That will be the next step in solving this puzzle."

At the other side of the room the conference was breaking up. "Well," said Uncle Peter, "those are my plans for tomorrow, and how I am going to enjoy putting them into operation! I'd never have been able to plan a campaign like this without your help, and it's going to be most exciting to see how successful it will be."

"And what a magnificent laugh we shall have, when it's all over," Dr. Foster said.

Aileen was sent back to bed, and the two boys were told to go and undress and get a bath. Jennifer offered to help make a camp bed in the sitting room for Dr. Foster, because she had been delegated by the others to tell Uncle Peter about the water-tank puzzle.

"Please don't bother about me," Dr. Foster assured her. "My driver can fix up my camp bed for me, and tomorrow I'll get out my small tent and I'll sleep in the garden. I'll show you how it goes up. It's a very good tent and folds into quite the smallest space possible. I'm rather proud of it, Jennifer."

"Auntie Kay, do you mind if I wait up for a few minutes longer? I just wanted to tell Uncle Peter about what Aileen and I saw tonight, because it was very queer. Dr. Foster might be able to help us, too."

"Why, of course Jennifer. Has something upset you? I know this can be a frightening place; but I hadn't noticed anything. I suppose I was far too worried about those rascally boys of ours," Auntie Kay replied.

"Come on Jennifer—out with it! Don't expect me to believe in ghosts, though, because I don't," her uncle said.

"No, this is nothing at all like that. You see, last night we all saw a man peering at the water tank and fumbling round the pillars. That was why Simon and Charles wanted to get back early today, to plan watches for tonight. Well, as they didn't get home, Aileen and I watched and the African did come back. He pulled a loose brick out of one of the pillars, but as he didn't find

anything he went away again. He really behaved in a very odd way and looked so frightened that we were sure he was doing something he didn't want us to find out. We could see him quite clearly through the bathroom window, because of the moonlight."

Aileen, who had been listening through the door came out again to say that it had all been most queer and she thought the man was probably a dagga smoker.

"Listen to our little vice-squad girl," her father said, laughing. "We've had enough adventures for one day but I promise that we'll all talk it over together tomorrow. You'll join our committee meeting won't you, Dr. Foster?"

Their unexpected guest smiled and said that he would very much like to, and he hoped that he could be of some help.

Jennifer admitted afterwards that she felt it in her bones from that very moment, that Dr. Foster would be a very great help indeed.

CHAPTER XI

How They Find a Secret Hiding Place

“JENNIFER, wake up,” called Simon, giving her a shake. “Charles and I have been out to look at the brick pillars in the yard, but we can’t find anything.” Jennifer rubbed her eyes and then remembered what Simon was talking about. She said sleepily: “Try the bottom right hand brick—the right hand pillar,” and then she snuggled down again to go back to sleep. “The hot tank,” she added, as a final word before dozing off.

The boys went outside and looked exactly where Jennifer had told them to. This particular brick didn’t look very different from any of the others. Then Charles took out his pen knife and scratched around the base. It was loose. He pulled the brick out quite easily, once he had edged it the first inch or two. He could just get his hand into the space which it left, but he could feel nothing. He did discover, however, that there was an empty, round, cigarette tin let into the ground beneath it.

“Simon, look at this! What a wonderful place to hide something small,” he called out in great excitement. Simon looked carefully, putting his hand inside the tin; but it was empty. He then took up the brick, tapped it; but there was nothing curious about it. The two boys slipped it back into its place and went into the house.

“Jennie, wake up—do!” yelled Simon right into her ear.

"You simply must get up and see the tiny hiding place we've found—just where you said it would be."

At the word 'hiding place,' Jennifer sat up in bed as quickly as though somebody had put a cold sponge on her face. She rubbed the ear which was just recovering from Simon's shouts. In a second she was completely awake. "There, what did I tell you. I was certain about it, wasn't I?" she said with glee.

Soon the entire household was in a turmoil. Uncle Peter was busy making arrangements for his day's work, and Auntie Kay for the day's meals. The children were all talking excitedly about the find under the water tank.

In the midst of all this a warbling sound was heard coming from outside.

"What on earth's that dreary sound?" Jennifer exclaimed.

"That's the kind of noise all the old women made when we entered villages with Uncle Peter," Simon told her. "They wag a finger in their mouths and simply howl."

"That will be the local Chief arriving with his Assessors and the Court Clerk," Auntie Kay said. "Your father told me he was going to review cases today and hear claims for tax exemption," she said to Charles, who had just come in from the garden.

The children looked out and saw a small group of people approaching the old Boma. They were wearing black gowns like schoolmasters.

"That's the Chief—in front," Auntie Kay told them. "He really is a most dignified figure. I have hardly ever seen a Chief who wasn't."

"Mummy, which are the people who don't pay tax? I know that very old people don't have to," Aileen remarked.

"I don't really know. It's only a very small tax, in any case. People with twins get a year's tax exemption because they've got more than they bargained for in having an extra baby to look after. This always seems to

me very fair, and kind of the Government to help them. But, quite honestly, you'll have to ask your father what other exemptions there are."

They were all watching the Chief and his party arrive. As the procession approached, the carriers, servants and other African onlookers clapped their hands and knelt on the ground. To the complete dismay of the children from England one or two of the very old men lay down on their backs on the ground. Here they lay, rocking backwards and forwards on their backbones, clapping their hands and fore-arms as they rocked. Jennifer looked frightened, and wondered what had happened. Were these old men ill?

But Auntie Kay explained that this was the old fashioned 'Chief's Salute.' In the old days, all the Africans would have been down on the ground like that.

"Well, I think the modern version of that looks very dignified and shows great deference," Simon remarked. "In fact, I don't think I've ever seen people look more humble."

The Chief acknowledged the greetings, and went on his way to the Boma offices for the day's work.

Late in the afternoon Uncle Peter began to collect his paraphernalia for the evening's excursion to the witch doctor's village. Dr. Foster gave Uncle Peter the use of his Landrover. He said it would be easier to get right up to the village in it, than if he used the Boma truck.

Messengers and carriers, who could not be taken in the car, were sent off on foot, with instructions to wait at the point where the boys had been found by Dr. Foster the night before. Then the Landrover was loaded with what Uncle Peter termed his 'equipment.' It was when Uncle Peter referred to 'equipment' that he and Dr. Foster laughed so heartily. It was more than obvious that they were sharing some huge joke. Water sacks, ropes, ground sheets, a first aid box, blankets, the portable radio, maps and torches were packed into the back of the car. It

certainly seemed to the onlookers an odd assortment of things, to take on an expedition whose one purpose was to arrest a witch doctor.

"Please borrow anything else of mine that you think may be useful," Dr. Foster said. Then he looked up and added, "And how about borrowing me?"

"Now you've raised a very tricky question, I'm afraid. You see, I did think of asking you if you'd be prepared to stay behind. I wondered whether you would agree to take command of this over-enterprising family of mine. Now they've got it into their heads that there is some kind of mystery afoot here, they may do the craziest things while I'm away."

Dr. Foster stopped him and said: "Of course I'll stay. As a matter of fact I'd quite like to keep watch with the children. I had a wonderful opportunity, last night, of seeing that old witch doctor in all his glory. It would be an anti-climax for me to see him being arrested."

"Then you do believe that we've discovered something peculiar," Simon said. He looked so serious about it that Dr. Foster quickly assured him that indeed he did, and that he was as anxious as they were to find out more about it.

The usual little crowd of African children gathered at the door to watch the Landrover being loaded. Wide-eyed, they stood there smiling in amazement. There were one or two older girls standing on the edge of the crowd, talking and knitting. One of them stepped forward, shyly, and then ran back to her friends. She was making a sock. Jennifer went over to admire her work, and discovered that she was using two old bicycle spokes as needles. She said something to Jennifer, who smiled back; but of course Jennifer did not understand what was being said.

Dr. Foster translated: "She's asking you, Jennifer, if you can show her how to turn the heel. She's forgotten, as it's nearly a year since she was at school." Jennifer

felt the sock, which had been knitted in wool which had been unpicked from some other garment. It was well done, but extremely grubby. The knitting was quite the finest she had ever seen because bicycle spokes make very thin knitting needles indeed.

"I do wish I could help her," Jennifer said. "For she's making the most wonderful sock. I do think it's clever. I'll go and ask Auntie Kay if she knows how to do it." There was genuine admiration in her voice.

Auntie Kay came out and sat on the doorstep, with the little African girl beside her. It was such a long time since she had knitted socks that she had to look in a big knitting book to see how to do it. The little girl watched her, and she too looked at the picture in the book. Then, with a confident smile, and only a very little help from Auntie Kay, she took up her knitting and carried on. This really began a knitting class, for there were any number of little girls who wished to have help, once their first shyness had worn off. Jennifer was surprised to see how clever they all were, and although they had so little wool, they managed to make such pretty things. Knitted caps were very fashionable—Jennifer noticed this in Kasama and at Mporokoso. Some of the more gorgeous hats were adorned with hair slides, bows, pen knives, tin openers and the most varied assortment of spikey ornaments imaginable. At Mporokoso there had been one lady of fashion, who had stabbed her bicycle pump through her woollen hat like an eighteen-inch hatpin.

The knitting school, however, was finally interrupted by Lazalo who wished to speak to the Mama. So Jennifer was left like a school prefect, in charge. After Auntie Kay left, there was a great deal of giggling amongst the Africans who had some joke amongst themselves about Aileen. They would look at her and then turn away, pretending to be frightened.

"I've had this before, Jennifer. The Africans always

laugh at my light coloured eyes. They say I've got 'Nkalamo' eyes. They're hazel, you see, and Africans aren't used to hazel eyes except in lions. That's what they are laughing about. They say I've got lion's eyes," explained Aileen.

There was a twittering amongst the Africans, who shook their heads and agreed. Fancy a little girl with eyes the same colour as an 'Nkalamo'!

When the knitting school dispersed, Aileen went round to see what her mother was doing. She found her there, with a little African baby on her knee. The baby cried bitterly as she wrapped him up again in his grimy piece of cloth.

"He really ought to go to hospital," she said. "He's been terribly burnt with hot pumpkin. It happened last night and in the meantime they've covered the burns with some of their native 'muti'—a mixture of mud and leaves. In some ways it is quite sensible because it keeps the air out; but it makes it almost impossible to clean the burns properly." She handed the small bundle back to his mother for a moment, telling her to hold him while she went to find her first-aid box and some clean cloth.

Auntie Kay dressed the burns as best she could and then went to find Uncle Peter.

"There's a baby outside with pumpkin burns, Peter, I really think it should go to hospital. I've done all I can here; but the poor little thing needs skilful treatment, in addition to care and attention."

"The best thing I can do is to arrange for the mother to take her baby to Mpweto hospital. It's only about twelve miles around the edge of the lake to the Mission."

"Quite frankly, I think that's our only hope of saving its life."

"I don't know what pumpkin burns are," Jennifer commented. So Aileen explained to her that at this time of year Africans put large pumpkins to roast by the open fire. They sometimes forget to cut slits in the pumpkin,

so that the hot mush and steam inside can have some kind of outlet.

"Like putting water in a toffee tin on the fire to get hot, with the lid tight on," said Simon. "I did that once during the Christmas holidays, I remember. I was in bed and missed all my parties because my face was burnt."

"Pumpkin is worse than steam though," Aileen said, "because it's so sticky. It's rather like having a great tin of porridge exploding all over you."

When Auntie Kay had made all the arrangements for the baby and his mother to go to hospital, she came to join the rest of the family who were sitting outside the house watching the sunset and the lake. Jennifer felt so much on the edge of the world that she wondered whether, after all, one would fall off once one reached the horizon on Mweru.

What she had been told of the history of Chiengi disproved, however, this feeling of being right on the outside edge of the world.

Dr. Foster was talking to Simon and Charles. Jennifer heard him say that as far back as 1890 it had been decided to make a Boma on the north-eastern shore of Mweru. The original Boma had been called 'Rhodesia,' but this name was later given up and the local name of 'Chiengi' adopted.

"In some ways," he said, "this part of Africa is older in its contact with Europe than the great cities of the south."

"I was sitting here thinking that the world must be flat, not round, as we have always been told, and that once you reached the edge of Mweru you would fall right off the earth," Jennifer said.

"Then contact with civilisation must be ebbing away from you, Jennifer, just as it has ebbed away from Chiengi, leaving the Africans and their way of life very much as it has always been." Dr. Foster looked at Jennifer, who smiled and said, "I don't feel very twentieth century here."

I shall get an awful shock when I fly back to all the bustle of England."

About seven o'clock that evening Uncle Peter left with his party. The family were certain, when they saw him off, that there was some secret joke between himself and Dr. Foster, and that the joke had something to do with the witch doctor.

"I do hope you won't do anything rash and come to harm, Peter," Auntie Kay said. "You look rather like a schoolboy who's going off to get birds' eggs."

"Stop worrying, Kay. I'm off on a very serious mission; it's just that the methods I propose to adopt are a little unorthodox. I expect I shall be home long before dawn tomorrow; but even if I'm not, there's absolutely nothing to worry about at all." He got into the car, gave Auntie Kay a naughty wink, and quickly disappeared from view.

"Now we must get down to the really important arrangements," said Dr. Foster. "I shall ask Auntie Kay if I can put an armchair in the bathroom, so that I can sit and watch for our mysterious intruder. When something does happen I shall come and wake you all up."

"Then you do believe our story," Charles said.

"Of course I do; and what's more, even if I hadn't done so in the beginning, I certainly would after I'd seen the secret hiding place you showed me."

"I think I shall be too excited to sleep," Aileen said, and Jennifer agreed with her.

"You probably wouldn't sleep if you thought you were going to miss something. But you aren't because I am going to wake you all up in good time. That's a promise." So very soon they were all in bed.

It was shortly after one in the morning, when the first signs of activity were heard through the bathroom window. It was a shuffling sound—exactly as the children had described it. Dr. Foster hurried across to the two boys, who were up and in their dressing gowns as quickly as though they'd been taking part in a race. Jennifer and

Aileen were slower; but they arrived in time to see a shadow move across the yard towards the trees. It was a very long thin shadow, distorted in the queer way that shadows often are. So long was it, in fact, that the person casting it looked insignificant when he came into view. Wide eyed, Jennifer and Aileen exchanged glances which said, "This wasn't the man who came last night." They crept up to the window to make quite sure. Aileen shook her head and was about to say something; but Dr. Foster held his finger up as if to say, "Don't make a sound . . . please." They could hear each other's breath coming in short excited rushes and Jennifer felt something rapping inside her like the keys of a typewriter. This man was not the fisherman. He was tired and dusty and his clothes looked as though he had travelled a very long way. He had a small bundle tied up with a strap to the carrier of a blue racing cycle. He unfastened the bundle and put it on the ground. He looked round at the house; but that was in complete darkness and smoke no longer came out of the chimney to give any sign that the house was inhabited.

The traveller stood up and looked thoughtfully at the water drums. Then, without hesitation he went over to the hot water tank and took out the brick. He remained stooping over it for several minutes. The brick must have been replaced before he got up, because when he did so, he brushed his hands together as though he were getting rid of sand. No sign was left to show that he had tampered with the brickwork.

As he moved away it was easier to get a good look at him. He walked away from them and the children could get up close to the window. Jennifer said afterwards that his corduroy trousers were green; but the boys thought they were brown. They were fastened at the ankles with cycle clips. There was little that was curious about his appearance, except, perhaps that he wore his fuzzy hair longer than usual, in a dandified manner down the sides of his face. He had on a golfer's jacket fastened from the

neck to the waist with a zipp. It was obvious from his dress that he was a man of means.

"Now, listen. I want you to keep very quiet indeed," Dr. Foster said, "then in a few minutes I'm going to slip outside with Charles to have a look under that brick. We can't all go. So I'll take Charles this time, and we'll report back to the rest of you."

Auntie Kay, who at first pretended not to hear all the footsteps crossing the sitting room, had now joined the party and was just as excited as the rest of them.

"Please, Dr. Foster, can't I come too?" said Simon.

"And me!" Jennifer exclaimed.

"Well, and how about me?" begged Aileen in rather a tearful voice.

Dr. Foster looked despairingly at the four eager faces. "Well, perhaps you can all come; but I do think it's important to be very quiet and extremely quick."

"Yes, and to have your dressing gowns closed up at the neck and your strong shoes on. I don't really like all this going out at night, although you have taken your anti-malaria tablets regularly." Auntie Kay looked worried again. She turned to Dr. Foster and said: "It's not as if I were only looking after my own children. I don't want to have to write back to England and say that Jennifer or Simon have malaria."

There was a great deal of shuffling and whispering as the children changed their bedroom slippers for their out-door shoes. Dr. Foster then led the way out by the front door, taking care that no lights were showing. Jennifer had her torch in her hand, but to her dismay, Dr. Foster took it from her.

"That's just silly," he said. "After all, if it's bright enough for us to see what kind of clothes the African wore, then we certainly don't need a torch. We might want it badly later on, when there's no moon. You can't get new batteries at Chiengi!"

The sky was free from clouds and Charles noticed that

there were more stars showing in the immensity of the heavens than there ever seemed to be in England. He was sure that Dr. Foster knew some astronomy. He must remember to ask him. The little procession hurried round the side of the house into the yard. There was nobody about. Dr. Foster sat down on the ground and took out the brick. The children gathered round him eagerly. Aileen started to prance with impatience as Dr. Foster put his hand into the little tin.

"Here it is," he said, bringing out a little purse. "Well, maybe it's money after all. Golden sovereigns perhaps. I believe there are still some to be found in African villages."

The purse was made of antelope skin—possibly of duiker—but it was very small and hard to tell. It was fastened with a thong and a small leather toggle. The whole thing was not more than three inches square.

"No time for guessing. We've got to be quick," he said. He unfastened the thong and looked inside. "This is interesting," he muttered quietly to himself, as he rolled out half a dozen pieces of rough white rock into the palm of his hand.

"What's that," Simon said. "Looks like bits of quartz to me. What a funny thing to be so mysterious about."

"Oh, I think I know why they've taken so much trouble. I'll take out two bits and put the other four back. Then we can return to our look-out and watch again. I do believe we're getting somewhere after all!" Aileen and Jennifer ran into the house. Dr. Foster replaced the leather purse and he and the two boys hurried back inside.

Dr. Foster shone a beam from Jennifer's torch on the sitting room table, and into the pool of light he dropped the two bits of rock. They looked like rough pieces of old, chipped glass, until he moved the torchlight across them several times and made them gleam. Jennifer thought they were rather pretty, but nothing to make a fuss about.

"Well, I am disappointed," she commented in a flat

sort of voice. "The biggest bit is not much bigger than the top of my toothpaste tube."

Charles said, in a resigned sort of voice, "Oh well, I suppose Africans use this stuff for some kind of magic, and that's why they were making such a secret about it."

His mother came across to look. She laughed. "Well now, you've solved your mystery, so you can all settle down again in bed. We'll arrange some picnics and treats for later in the week. I'm sure we can find a lot of interesting things to do. We'll keep these bits, Charles, and we can ask Daddy if he knows why the Africans value them."

"It's not quite as simple as that," Dr. Foster said suddenly. They had all forgotten about him, and the sound of his voice made them jump. He spoke seriously. He said: "I'm a biologist, not a minerologist. These may only be some pretty stones called agate; but I rather think they may be something far more valuable—diamonds from Tanganyika, or perhaps the Congo."

"Diamonds," said a breathless chorus of four voices.

"We'll have to put our heads together and think it out. In the meantime we must keep watch on the yard, to see who comes next to collect the skin purse. I don't think you should all stay up, so we'll draw lots for it." He took a box of matches from the ash tray on the table and broke several up into varying lengths. "The person who gets the longest bit stays up to watch with me," he said, placing the pieces between his finger and thumb so that they all looked the same size. They each took a matchstick and placed them in a row on the table. At first they thought Aileen had won, but her piece, when measured was not really quite as long as Simon's.

"You lucky thing!" Aileen said to him, as she went off to her room.

"Disappointment's got her to bed far more quickly than nagging," teased Charles, who dawdled about for a few minutes while Simon and Dr. Foster settled themselves comfortably in the bathroom for their moonlight vigil.

"No cheating, Charles," Jennifer called out to him, so he was forced to go off too.

"We shall have to talk about our puzzle, Simón," Dr. Foster said to him. "That will be by far the best way to keep awake. I think, you see, that perhaps some diamond smugglers have been using Chiengi as a half-way house where they change runners. We can be sure of this, once we know that these are really diamonds."

"But how are we going to tell, if you're not that kind of an 'ologist.' I don't think Uncle Peter is either."

"I expect Uncle Peter's a lawyer. Quite a number of District Commissioners are. They have a great deal of legal work in their job, because they are magistrates in addition to all their other duties."

"In that case he'd know if diamond smuggling is against the law, wouldn't he?"

"That's a thing even I can tell you. It certainly is! In spite of the greatest precautions against stealing, diamonds are continually being smuggled out of the Mines, and these are the ones that find their way on to the illicit diamond market. In the bars and cafés on the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia, people are continually being caught by the police, trying to sell uncut stones at bargain prices."

"It must be tremendously important, then, to some people, if they are prepared to run all these risks to get hold of stones."

"Of course it is. Not only are they used for jewellery, but there are industrial diamonds. These are mostly the smaller ones. They don't need to have perfect stones for this; but diamonds are one of the hardest known substances and they are used for cutting and drilling tough materials in many branches of industry. You've probably seen a glass-cutting diamond, when somebody's repairing a window."

Simon agreed that he had. He showed Dr. Foster a mark on one of the panes of the bathroom window, where

a diamond had been clumsily used and had started to go off the straight line. He went across and ran his nail up the tiny scratch in the glass. As he did so, he stopped, with his hand still resting on the window. He then beckoned to Dr. Foster to come and look. There was an African out in the yard; but almost out of sight. He was unfastening his shoes. He stepped out of them and came round to the front of the fire. He stooped quickly down and whipped out the brick. In a flash he took the small purse out of the tin, put the brick back in its place and was gone.

"Do you think you could recognise him again?" Dr. Foster asked Simon.

"Yes, I can, quite easily. You see, while the knitting school was on yesterday, Charles and I went down to the shore and had a talk with some of the fishermen. We wanted to find out more about this man that Jennifer and Aileen talked about. We saw this actual fellow, you know." Simon spoke excitedly, running one word into the next without pausing for breath. "Yes, we found out his name, too. What was it now? I know, something like Serafino; but Charles will probably remember." Simon stood in the doorway, swinging the door backwards and forwards in his excitement. It made a hideous creaking sound; but he was far too restless to notice.

"We'll find him in the morning and see what he has to say for himself. I don't suppose there will be anything more to see tonight, so we'll go off to bed, Simon."

"Goodnight, Dr. Foster. Thank you very much for helping us with our mystery. We shall have quite an exciting instalment of our story to tell Uncle Peter when he comes back tomorrow."

"It will be a competition, I think, for he's going to have quite an amusing tale to tell us too. Now, off you go. I'm going out to my tent in the garden."

CHAPTER XII

The Witch Doctor is Arrested

LONG before breakfast the Landrover was heard making for Chiengi, so that by the time it reached the house the whole family were ready to greet Uncle Peter. They were in varied degrees of undress; but everyone was sleepy after the excitements of the night before. Looking through the windscreen into the back of the car, they could see there was quite a crowd of people being brought back to the Boma. Almost before the brakes were on the Head Messenger, with a broad smile on his face, jumped out of the back. He gave Auntie Kay a smart salute. He said: "Mutende, Mama," and then turned to help the other passengers out.

Dr. Foster stuck his head out of his tent and called: "Any luck? How did the scheme go off?"

"Splendidly," Uncle Peter called back. "Come to breakfast and I'll tell you all about it." Then he turned and gave a happy smile to Auntie Kay and the two girls.

Some dishevelled looking Africans were being taken without much ceremony from the Landrover. The two in handcuffs looked the least prepossessing. An old man, his face wrinkled like an old leather boot, stood blinking into the morning sunlight. He had on an old 'British Warm,' so long past its prime that it must have been a relic from the 1914 war, grubby sand shoes and a square, black skull-cap. His outfit was no doubt a monument to the second-hand clothes trade which flourished in the Belgian Congo. The other African in handcuffs was a more nondescript figure. He looked unhappy and was shivering.

"Do you recognise these people, Charles?" his father asked. He looked vague and said he was afraid not.

"Well, the gentleman in the handcuffs looking so sad is Mulenga, whose village was the scene of the witch doctor's orgy. He has quite a lot to answer for, because, as you suggested to me, it was no proper village but an unlawful settlement that had never been properly registered. This dear old man in the Army greatcoat, with the paternal expression on his face is the witch doctor himself."

They all held their breath in amazement! How could this venerable man have struck such terror into the hearts of so many people.

"Daddy, I just can't believe it! He looked absolutely terrifying when we watched him that night. He looked tremendously tall too. I'll admit that we were crouching on the ground, but even so, he really looked enormous."

"He's a man with a fine sense of drama. When we've had something to eat, I'll show you his fancy dress. I've got it all in the back of the car. Really a very fine specimen."

"How exciting, can we try it on?" said several happy voices. "I'm longing to see how he made himself look so tall," said Charles. "I could have sworn he was six feet three; but this little fellow's not much larger than I am."

The messengers took the prisoners round to some ancient cells a short distance from the house. After breakfast Uncle Peter told them his story.

Uncle Peter said he went off just as they had planned, and must have got the car almost up to the tree in which Simon and Charles spent the night. Anyway, he was very near the village and could watch their preparations, which had been very similar to those of the night before.

The messengers unloaded the car and presently the party on foot joined them, so there were about fifteen of them in all. They hid quietly in the bush until the beer and dancing had worked the villagers into a state of frenzy, and the shuffling, swaying crowd were oblivious to

everything but the drumming and the sinister gymnastics of the witch doctor.

"It was at this point," Uncle Peter said, "that I first heard the gramophone. I think they must have saved the brass band up until the excitement reached its highest peak. There's no doubt that the old man was an excellent showman. Anyway, this was the moment when we put our mysterious plan into operation."

"Is this the plan you and Dr. Foster were laughing about, Daddy?" Aileen said. But her father went on with his story: "You saw me take the radio. Well, I had one of the messengers carry it to the very edge of the clearing, but keeping himself out of sight in some bushes. There was no proper clearing, as you know, so we were almost able to join the magic circle without being seen. It is surprising how much dance music there is on the air in the middle of the night.

"So I found a really loud station and bided my time. On about the third round of the gramophone, I turned the wireless up full blast! The messenger walked slowly round the outer edge of the village. This caused the most tremendous consternation. I suppose some of the audience thought this was yet another trick the old man had up his sleeve. The drumming and shouting stopped completely and there, in the middle of the crowd stood the witch doctor, like an actor who's forgotten his lines and was too nervous to catch what the prompter was telling him.

"He looked towards the wireless music and when his back was turned two other messengers slipped up behind him and clipped on the handcuffs."

"That can't have been too easy because of those frightful claws he had over his hands," Simon said. "They were horrible."

"At the same time, two others handcuffed Headman Mulenga, who was operating the old gramophone," continued Uncle Peter. "And after that it was easy. I brought the wireless out into the centre of the sham

village, and showed the people how it worked. Quite a number of them had seen wireless sets before, so they knew all about it. I explained to them how stupid they'd been in believing the old witch doctor had magic powers. I told them how silly it was to be intimidated by an old man with a gramophone. The messengers took the witch doctor along to the hut where he had left his clothes, and removed his finery. Here he dressed in the 'civvies' which you have already admired. Well, that's about all. We have Headman Malenga and several other witnesses with us, so I shall go ahead and hear what they have to say as soon as I can."

"Please may we go and look at the witch doctor's things?" Aileen said, making for the door. Her father told her that they might all go and look, but they were not to spoil anything, as all the horrid trappings were court exhibits and would be on view when the men were tried in Kasama.

The messengers spread all the trophies out on the grass. The shaggy 'skin' which had looked so terrifying when Charles and Simon saw the witch doctor shambling through the bush, was rather like a knitted sleeping suit, with squares of black monkey fur sewn on to it. Simon thought it looked like the leavings from a moths' banquet. The palm leaf rattles had cone-shaped handles tightly plaited, while at the other end the leaves were left free like a fly switch. Simon picked one up and shook it. It made a sighing sound, like wind blowing through long grass. The garters made of gourds were threaded on old nylon stockings, and there was a collection of horns, bottles, tiny clay figurines, razor blades, tortoise shells studded with beads, rattles made out of round cigarette tins, civet cat skins and other bits of fur and snakeskin. There was an old suitcase and a red plastic purse with some money in it; there was a finely woven belt made of beads, and last of all the gramophone and its single, warped record.

"Now I know why the brass band kept such poor time. Look, Charles," Simon said, pointing to the undulating surface of the wax record. "No wonder there were such variations!" The label was partly missing from the record, but Simon could just read the words 'Grenadier Guards'. He thought how amused they would be to know of the sinister use of their music, by an old witch doctor far away in the African bush.

"What a muddle it all is," Jennifer remarked, thoughtfully. "There's all this mumbo jumbo of the dark ages mixed up with rather nasty bits of present day trash."

"If you'd seen the witch doctor dressed up and in his glory you would find it hard to believe that it was made up of all this," Simon told her, glancing at the pitiful collection of oddments.

"You have to remember that the moon and the beer helped him to cast his spell," said Charles.

"I hadn't had any beer, but I was frightened too," Simon admitted. "I think it was the mask that gave the final touch of horror." He picked up the grotesque, crudely made thing, a mockery of a human face, shaped rather like a shield with eyelid holes, and a slit for a mouth. He held it up in front of his own face and turned towards Aileen, who put her hands up to her eyes and fled into the house.

"Yes, it does look sad and tawdry by the light of day," Uncle Peter said, "but I did promise you that the witch doctor would be a rather shabby old man, didn't I?" Jennifer remembered that he had indeed done so.

"Ask the Boma driver to come and see me," he said, turning to Simon, "I'm going to call the dining-room my office for the next hour or two, so you can tell him he'll find me in there."

As he went indoors, Uncle Peter said: "That's my excitement over. Now, Dr. Foster, I am most anxious to know what kind of a night you had. Are there any further developments in the water tank mystery? It was most good

of you to agree to stay behind, because there's no telling what those boys will be up to next."

"Or the girls, for that matter. It was Aileen and Jennifer who gave us chapter two of the story remember!" Dr. Foster began to feel around in his pockets. "As a matter of fact, our story is progressing and I wanted to tell you about it and ask you what you think. Have you any idea what these are?" He dropped the two little pebbles into the palm of Uncle Peter's hand.

"I've no idea at all, but they're quite attractive. I would say—just making a guess—some kind of quartz. Well I don't know. They are exceptionally brilliant for quartz and very pretty." He pushed them back and forwards across his hand, admiring them.

Dr. Foster gave him a brief outline of the night's happenings. "I feel certain these must be of some value, otherwise why is it all wrapped in such mystery?" He took a piece of paper out of his pocket. "I've made a few notes, so that later on we won't forget exactly what happened. You see, although I don't know much about precious stones, I believe these could be diamonds."

Uncle Peter looked up. He said sharply: "Diamonds?"

"Well, why not? Down the old slave route from the Tanganyika Mines, you know."

"You are quite right. They might be. I wish we could find out what they are, because then we could make arrangements to have the diamond smugglers caught. It seems hard to believe that we've got diamond smuggling going on, not merely under our noses, but right under our very own bathwater."

"Yes, on the face of it, it is pretty bold; but you have to remember that this trip to Chiengi was unexpected. So far as the smugglers are concerned, this is an empty house."

"It's been empty for a very long time, too, because on several occasions when this area has been toured, this house wasn't used at all and the family lived in tents. As a matter of fact, I only came here this time because I

thought it would be better for Simon and Jennifer, just out from England, to be in a house instead of spending a long time under canvas."

"Think how horrified the smugglers must have been to find us all living here!"

"That would account for their frantic behaviour, wouldn't it?" said Uncle Peter thoughtfully.

"I'll tell you what I've done," continued Dr. Foster. "I've written to a friend of mine who is a bit of an expert on precious stones. Do you think there is any way of getting my letter and these two specimens on the plane at Kasama? It would help, I think, if we could do so as soon as possible." He wrapped the two samples up in cotton wool and put them into an envelope.

"The more I think about your theory, the more I believe it's possible. Chiengi would be an excellent place to change runners. Yes, the diamonds would, of course, come from Tanganyika. I'll certainly get that letter posted for you at Kasama." Uncle Peter went over to have a look at his map. He showed it to Dr. Foster.

"Don't you think this is the way they'd probably come?" he said, drawing a line from the shore of Lake Tanganyika westwards, just south of the Congo frontier, to Chiengi. "At any rate, they could use this route in the dry weather."

"That's my view, too. It also explains why they are in such a hurry. They probably want to get as much through as they can before the rains," said Dr. Foster.

"I've been thinking it over. I'll send the truck into Kasama at once with your letter. Never mind about any other plans at the moment—it is vital that we should find out what these samples are . . . essential!" Then Uncle Peter said merrily: "I'm getting very nearly as excited as the children are about their mystery."

This is the map that Uncle Peter looked at with Dr. Foster. He drew the dotted line to show the way he believed the cyclist might have travelled.



Map with the line of small dots which Uncle Peter drew to show the way he believed the cyclist might have travelled.

These are the notes that Dr. Foster made on the piece of paper.

- 9 p.m. Settled in easy chair at bathroom window.
- 10 p.m. Saw large ginger cockroach proceeding along edge of bath.
- 10.5 p.m. Large cockroach departs down plug-hole.
- 12.50 p.m. Noise in Yard. Call children.
- 1.5 a.m. First intruder arrives. Hides something in brick.
- 1.10 a.m. Intruder departs.
- 1.15 a.m. Hiding place inspected by Simon, Charles, Jennifer, Aileen, Foster.
Purse discovered. Six pebbles inside.
- 1.20 a.m. Return purse to hiding place. Two pebbles kept.

- 1.25 a.m. Re-enter house. Draw lots to see who will stay up.
- 1.40 a.m. Simon wins lottery. Charles tries to hang about but Jennifer does some thought reading.
- 2 a.m. Second intruder appears. Simon believes him to be fish seller.
- 2.7 a.m. Fish seller takes purse from hiding place and is gone.
- 2.11 a.m. S. and self end watch.

CHAPTER XIII

News of Serafino the Fish Pedlar

“**T**ODAY we must have a meeting of Chiefs of Staff,” Dr. Foster said to his four colleagues. “There are two main things for us to find out. Firstly, where the pebbles come from and, secondly, who takes them from Chiengi and where they go.”

“That will mean two separate expeditions,” Charles said. “One party will have to go eastwards to Tanganyika, if our theory is correct. Then the second intruder will have to be identified and followed.”

Dr. Foster agreed with him. “I think our main task for today is to try and find out something more about our friend Serafino.”

“Then we must go down to the shore,” Aileen said.

“And ask some of the dried-fish sellers,” added Jennifer.

“But suppose we find him there, himself?” asked Simon.

“Well, if we do, it won’t matter. We can see if he looks sheepish; or he might let out some useful bit of information about his plans,” said Charles.

They were all anxious to know more about Serafino and trooped along gaily with Dr. Foster to the lake-side. For such a wide stretch of shore there were few people about, one or two women fetching water or washing their clothes. There were two old men bailing out a dug-out

canoe with a calabash and an old jam tin. Further along, they could see cut grass spread out on clean stones, like a table-cloth prepared for a picnic. Lying side by side in rows, were fish, opened up like kippers and drying in the sun. The flesh was a fine toasted brown colour, and little beads of oil showed on the surface, where they had been drawn out by the sun.

A little distance from the first, an old man was preparing a similar table-cloth of grass.

"What have we here? A man or a fish, dead or alive? He smells like a fish. Were I in England now, as once I was" . . . chanted Jennifer, skipping away ahead of the others.

"Really, my sister talks an awful lot of rubbish," Simon said apologetically to Dr. Foster; but he just laughed.

"Jennifer," he called out. "When did you 'do' *The Tempest*?"

"Last term—that's why I still remember some of it," she called back over her shoulder.

"Well the name is 'Serafino'; not 'Caliban'!"

"Serafino?" said the old man. "Why, Serafino, he has gone to Johnstone Falls today. He is strong and he can go a long way to sell his fish. He makes plenty of money, Bwana. One day soon he will buy a fish lorry."

"That's what he told us," Jennifer said.

"Yes, Bwana," the old man nodded his head in a contemplative way. "Serafino; he's too clever!"

As Dr. Foster turned to go, he smiled and said he hoped Serafino wasn't going to prove "too clever" for them. "Quite frankly, I'm sure if we give our minds to it that between us we can out-smart him."

To Simon's dismay he heard his sister calling out: "A most scurvy monster. I could find it in my heart to beat him."

Simon and Charles hurried on ahead, leaving Jennifer out of earshot. They both thought that quoting Shakespeare was quite the worst way of showing off.

"Do wait for me," moaned Aileen. "You know how I hate walking. I wouldn't have come if I'd known you were going as far as this."

Dr. Foster stayed behind to keep her company and to give her a helping hand over the rough ground and tussocks of grass.

"I think we can look forward to a few peaceful days," Dr. Foster said at lunch time. "We've been along by the lake and discovered that Serafino is away today. They tell us that he's gone to Johnstone Falls to sell his fish. So he can't be back until the day after tomorrow at the very earliest."

"That's a very useful piece of news," said Uncle Peter. "I wonder if his fish selling journeys always coincide with the arrival of a purse full of stones. That other fellow won't get down from Tanganyika, either, for a day or so. He hasn't quite so far to go as Serafino, so he should be back here first. I am rather assuming that our racing cycle friend is a link in the chain of smugglers operating from Tanganyika."

"So you really, truly believe we've discovered smugglers, Uncle Peter?" Simon asked excitedly.

"I'll go so far as to say it looks very much as though you have—and I'm as eager as all of you to know the answer. I've sent the truck into Kasama to post Dr. Foster's letter, so that we can get an opinion as soon as possible on the samples."

"I asked them to send you a report by telegram to Mporokoso," Dr. Foster said. "That seemed to me the quickest way to arrange it."

"We are all hoping, Dr. Foster, that you will return to Mporokoso with us," Uncle Peter said, and Auntie Kay added, "Indeed we do."

"That is very kind of you; but that's another thing I'll have to think about during the next few days. I have quite a bit of local leave in hand; but we don't know yet how our mystery is going to work out, or how long it will take."

Simon woke up from a day dream. "I've got an idea," he said. "Do you think we could ask one of the messengers, say Nason, for instance, to make enquiries for us about the chap with the racing cycle? He could ask the village people. It wouldn't be so obvious as if we made enquiries, and if Nason did find out that he came from Tanganyika, that would make it easier for us to plan."

"That's an excellent idea," said his Uncle. "I'm sure you will think so, too, Dr. Foster."

"I do indeed. I wonder who would be the best person to discuss it with Nason?"

Charles said: "I think I would. You see, he's an old friend. I often ask him questions about Africa. You might almost say that he's my tutor, where Africa is concerned. By the way, Daddy, did you know there were two kinds of hyaena? There is one with stripes as well as one with spots."

"I didn't," said Aileen. "Who told you? Nason?"

"Yes, he says there are. It's the spotted one that makes that horrible noise at night, of course."

"Why do people say they laugh? I never think it sounds like laughing." Aileen looked around for somebody to disagree with, but Charles went on: "Hyaenas are the scavengers of the bush—like vultures. Now that's something you didn't know, Jennifer. And what's more, they're cowards and have even been known to creep up to a sleeping African and gnaw his face or his feet." Charles advanced on Jennifer, with his hands stretched out like claws.

"How horrible. I don't think I want to know about creatures like that," Jennifer replied with a shudder.

"You seem to forget that we were trying to make a plan for the next few days. Smugglers are the subject under discussion; not hyaena." Uncle Peter's voice reminded them of more urgent things.

"Yes, Daddy, and I'm going to ask Nason about the man with the blue cycle," Charles said, just to show that

he'd been concentrating in spite of the digression. "Leave it to me."

"Don't go about it as though you were a village policeman in a pantomime. We don't want to give anyone an inkling of our suspicions, you know," his father replied. Charles promised to use what he called the 'utmost discretion'; but his father was very doubtful whether he really knew what the words meant. However, this did provide him with an occupation during the following day or so, while they were waiting for some useful clue or the return of their suspects.

The weather was becoming warmer and although there had been no shower of rain since April, the trees which had looked so wintry were now covered with green leaves. There were dust devils in the middle of the day, which started by the merry dancing of a few dry leaves and gradually increased in power until a solid column of sand and rubbish charged across the landscape like a robber pursued.

One morning some African piccanins came to the house carrying a piece of tree trunk about a foot long. It was possibly as much as six inches in diameter, but not more. They were chattering away together about what price they were going to ask for their trophy.

Then the boldest of them knocked on the back door. He said in Chibemba: "I want to speak to the Mama."

Auntie Kay went out to talk to them. The piccanins appeared reluctant to disclose the nature of their wares. Auntie Kay called to Jennifer and Aileen.

"They are selling something at the door. Are you interested? I have no idea what it is!"

"Ten and sickish, Mama," said the salesman. He took from one end of the log a lump of grass and rag which had been used as a bung. He then put his hand inside and drew out by the leg a small, furry animal half monkey half mouse. It had pretty rounded ears and enormous black eyes.

"Ten and sickish," the piccanin said again, holding the terrified animal firmly in his fist. It was blinking in the sunlight and its ears were twitching with fright.

"Oh, Mummy, we really must buy it quickly," Aileen said, putting her hand out for it. "It's absolutely terrified. Fancy carrying it about in a bit of hollowed tree without any air or light!"

The bush baby looked so appealing, that there was no question about whether they would buy it. The only argument was about the price. Finally, after some keen bargaining, which the sellers had expected when they first stated their price, the sum of eight shillings was agreed upon, instead of the original ten and six.

"I hope Sooty won't mind my having this new pet," Aileen said. But her mother thought of a way to spare Sooty's feelings. "I think you'd better let Jennifer have the bush baby," she said.

By this time Aileen had tucked the tiny creature into her jersey, where it cuddled down against her to keep warm. With some effort they got it out and handed the frail looking animal over to Jennifer. She examined it carefully. It had tiny monkey-like fingers and very woolly fur. Its sharp black eyes had heavy lids. Its tail, fur coated, was longer than its body. The bush baby's tiny rounded ears were not fur covered, and they moved backwards and forwards incessantly, as though it were afraid of missing something really important.

Aileen went off to get some food, and fetched milk and cake crumbs, both of which it soon finished in spite of being in strange surroundings. Having fed, the small animal seemed more interested in the world he lived in.

"We shall have to make a little cage for it," Jennifer said. She was very surprised when Charles told her that it would soon become a domestic pet and part of the household. As for sleeping quarters, during the day it would curl up in a ball somewhere and at night the bush baby would probably prowls round the house.

"It will have to have a name," Jennifer said. So they talked over any number of possibilities. The small creature sat watching them, rolling its eyes and looking immensely concerned over their suggestions.



A Bush Baby

"He looks as though he had glasses on," somebody said. Another voice said: "Goggles, not glasses!"

"Why not call him Goggles?" Simon said. Auntie Kay thought that this described him exactly.

For two nights nobody bothered to watch for smugglers, but on the third, when all their plans were ready Dr. Foster settled down in the armchair which now remained permanently in the bathroom. He found it difficult to keep awake; the good fresh air of Chiengi and walks in the wind and the sunshine made him feel more sleepy than he would normally have been. If he could have read a book it would have been easier to keep awake; but just sitting there for several hours on end took a great deal of will-power.

Dr. Foster was thinking about his work, and of the curious local leave he was now spending with his new friends, when suddenly something landed on his shoulder and clung there. It felt like a hand grasping him. There was a hideous cackle of laughter. He jumped up to face his attacker. This quick movement loosened the grip from his shoulder and Goggles slipped down on to his cuff. The tiny animal looked at him with big, apologetic eyes. He was shivering and tried to work his way under the lapel of Dr. Foster's jacket. He could only have reached the bathroom by getting over the wall of the children's room, for he had begun the night by snuggling up to Jennifer. Soon Goggles stopped shaking and clung, like a strap-hanger in an overloaded train, to Dr. Foster's tie.

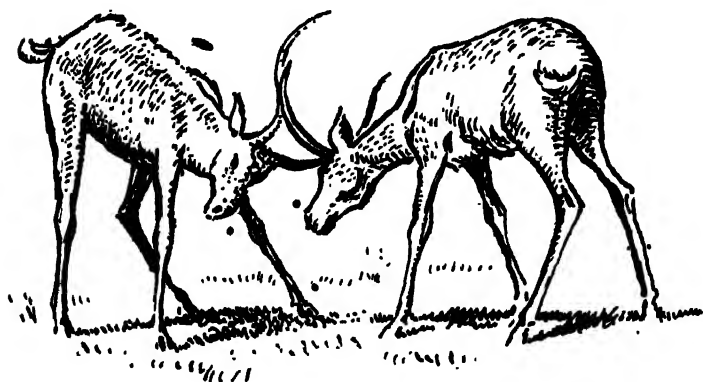
"Now listen, Goggles," he said, "You and I have to stay awake. It is no use making yourself so comfortable and making me so nice and warm that we both fall asleep."

Dr. Foster pushed Goggles down inside his jacket and looked at his wrist watch. It was just after five and the night was nearly over, when a very weary African pushed a cycle across the yard. He moved as though he didn't care whether he was seen or not. Then he pulled himself together and hurried over to the water tank. He kicked some spare logs aside, and swiftly pulled out the loose brick. He did this as easily as though he had pulled out the drawer of a well-made cabinet.

After the African left, Dr. Foster took Goggles out of his jacket and sat him on a ledge in the sitting room. He went to the front door and looked out. The early morning light was opaque and greenish. It reminded him of underwater photographs. There were sounds from the village of people beginning to stir, and several roosters, with a squawk, were sounding their morning alarms.

It took only a few minutes to collect the enemy's spoil. There were eight pretty sparkling pebbles, several of them larger than the ones before. Dr. Foster took the four argest and returned the remainder to their hiding place.

In a few hours time, Simon and Charles, with Dr. Foster driving, were on their way eastwards to Tanganyika. Before leaving, the four new stones were handed to Uncle Peter who, by now, was quite convinced that they were on the track of some very resolute smugglers.



CHAPTER XIV

On the Track of the Smugglers

THE Landrover followed the route eastwards to Tanganyika which, according to Nason's information, was usually taken by the African with the blue racing cycle. Both Dr. Foster and Uncle Peter thought it was of the utmost importance to trace the source of supply of the stones, and if possible to discover who were the organizers of the smuggling. Nason was able to tell Charles quite a lot about the racing cycle traveller, although he had no friends in the villages around Chiengi. The villagers all knew of him and said that he worked for Greek Bwanas who had fishing and trading boats on Lake Tanganyika. The Bwanas, so Nason said, gave him looking-glasses and combs, razor blades and knitting wool which he sold for them to Africans. There was one very curious thing, however, about his visits. Nobody at Chiengi could remember buying anything from him as he had always sold his wares by the time he reached them. Nobody knew where he spent the night, or where he cooked his food, and he had only been seen in the district since May.

Dr. Foster left the old track along the shore of lake Mweru and crossed to the east, parallel to but south of the Belgian frontier. Travelling was uncomfortable and full of minor hazards, but the small river beds had all dried up, and they encountered no serious obstacles. Their stout little car could take them almost anywhere—"as good as a horse"—Dr. Foster said, "and unlike a horse, it does not fall victim to the deadly tsetse fly." When they

went up hills Simon and Charles clung to the bar which ran along under the windscreen and for travelling down steep slopes they put their feet on it to get purchase.

They were not anxious to reach the lake before the hawker with his racing bicycle; but they wanted to have time in hand in case their information had been wrong. So they travelled at a leisurely speed, spending a night on the way.

Very early in the morning they broke camp while it was still dark, so that they could be down at the lake before the sun was up.

"I am certain this fellow must meet his contacts early in the morning. We can be pretty sure of that by working out the time he took to get from Chiengi and back," Dr. Foster said, as he loaded his tent and bedding into the car.

"His employers seem to work him very hard," Simon said. "They don't allow him much time for rest."

"That's why I am sure the gain must be considerable. Diamonds are the only things at all like our samples which would give them a really high reward; but when you consider the sums of money involved in the illicit diamond business, something like ten million pounds worth a year in South Africa alone, you can see that it can be a very paying proposition."

There was only a short distance to go before reaching their destination and it was easy to park the car where it would not arouse suspicion. There were trees and bushes, then a group of huts on the sloping ground leading to the lake shore. Near together, out on the water, they could see a number of fishermen, their canoes looking like floating logs. Muffled up in their jerseys, the three companions took an apparently aimless walk along the shore.

Chanda, Dr. Foster's driver knew the reason for this expedition to Lake Tanganyika, and had helped Nason when he made his enquiries at Chiengi. He was now

delighted to be on the trail, and said that any questioning of local people he would do himself, because he felt that if Dr. Foster were to ask, it might arouse suspicion.

There were two motor fishing boats some distance off the shore, moving in the direction of the dug-out canoes. The sound of their engines cut through the rural clamour of chickens, wood chopping and laughing piccanins, like repeated stabs from a stiletto.

One of the fishermen broke away from the gathering of canoeists, and began to paddle off to the left. The line he took was bound, sooner or later to intersect that of one of the motor-boats. Dr. Foster, with Charles and Simon, sat down under a clump of bushes to watch what was taking place. Just when a collision between the two seemed inevitable, the motor-boat veered round to allow the canoe to come alongside.

Like the bum-boats in a busy harbour, this solitary canoe bobbed about beside the larger craft.

"It looks like a puppy making friends with an Alsatian dog," Simon said.

But bum-boat practice was reversed, for it was the motor-boat which supplied the cargo to the canoe. The transfer did not take long. Two people could be seen leaning over the side of the motor-boat, gesticulating to the African, who was standing, one foot on each gunwale, shouting back.

"I wonder if the African is telling them that we're in the Chiengi house and that it is not a safe route any longer," Simon said. By gesture the two men ordered the African to leave them. The motor-boat waited for him to get away, then turned and sailed from the shore. Presently the wash reached the fishermen, whose canoes nodded and dipped to each other, till after a while all trace of the larger craft had disappeared.

"I think we can leave the rest to Chanda, don't you?" said Dr. Foster. "We'll sit here and watch what happens." He twirled his zebra-tail switch through the air, to chase

away two very tiresome flies which had attached themselves to the party.

"It will be a dreadful blow to all our theories if this canoe doesn't belong to the man we're looking for," Simon observed.

"There he is, look!" Charles said. The man was paddling fast towards the shore, but some little distance from the usual landing place. After a while Simon said he really couldn't sit there watching any longer. He thought there would be no harm in taking a stroll in the direction of the fisherman who had by now pulled his boat in and was working diligently alongside it.

"Very well, you go, Simon," said Charles. "We'll stay here for a bit and then go back to the car. I think if we all go with you it will be rather obvious. At all costs we mustn't make him suspicious, because we want Chanda to get into conversation with him."

Simon ran his fingers through his hair, as a preliminary to putting on his battered grey hat. He looked a typical beachcomber as he sauntered along with his hands jammed into his pockets. He found a stone and began to kick it. Then he got bored with this and picked it up and flung it into the water.

Charles, who was watching him with some amusement, said: "He's a better actor than I thought."

"Simon is doing well, isn't he?" agreed Dr. Foster. "How about you and I going back to the car and getting some food ready. If we're in luck, we can leave fairly soon for Chiengi." He got up and rubbed the dust and grass from his clothes.

In a little while Simon joined them. He was very excited and quite incoherent. Charles handed him a drink and a sandwich and presently, between gulps and mouthfuls, he told them what he had seen.

He ambled along the shore, he said, and had a good look into the canoe. There was no doubt about the identity of the African, who had been working away speedily,

gutting a few fish. There were some odds and ends in a small box beside him; looking-glasses and the kind of rubbish that hawkers sell all the world over. It was the fish that interested Simon. So he wandered a bit further along, collected a few pieces of broken wood, and then walked in a leisurely way back again. The African was concentrating on his work, and Simon did not think that the fisherman noticed him at all. Simon said he made quite sure that there were only about a dozen fish. What seemed so curious was the fact that the African wasn't bothering about what happened to the fish. He was only interested in the guts which he squeezed into an old basin.

It was a few hours before Chanda re-appeared. He said he had seen Simon leave the lake shore. Shortly afterwards, from his hiding place, he saw the African who had been gutting fish take the basin down to the water's edge. He filled up the basin and seemed to be moving the water about with his hand as though he were cleaning something. Then he bent down and fumbled in the basin with both hands. He seemed to take various things out of the water and put them into what he supposed was a small purse. Then, when he had finished, the contents of the basin were flung back into the lake and the man pulled his canoe right up into the bushes.

Chanda had then watched the man collect his box of trinkets, and the old basin, and then make for one of the huts. All this had taken place very quickly. It was afterwards that Chanda had to wait so long, loafing around waiting to see if his suspect left the hut.

"And did you see him again?" Dr. Foster asked eagerly. "What happened after that? I think the fish business was just to bamboozle us."

"I waited for a very long time, and then he came out. He was dressed up in very warm clothes. He had a jacket fastening all the way up the front. But his bicycle, Bwana, he had a beautiful bicycle! It was not one of these ones that you see every day, painted black. It was a



'The African was concentrating on his work . . .'

see page 136.

beautiful blue one, and the handle-bars and wheels were very silver coloured. The tyres were not the kind you blow up with a pump, which go 'bang' when you ride over a thorn. They were solid and were made of pink coloured rubber. I think he must have bought it in the Congo."

"Chanda, you've done very well indeed. Just how well I think we shall be able to tell you within a few weeks. Thank you very much," said Dr. Foster. "Now we must see if we can get home in one lap. I know the way now, and even if I do have to drive the last few miles in the dark, it won't be too difficult."

They were all eager to get back, and to learn what further developments there had been at Chiengi. Before they left Uncle Peter had promised to keep watch for them the night they were away, and to make arrangements to have Serafino followed if, in fact, he did return.

CHAPTER XV

Further News about Serafino

“THERE’S one thing I just can’t understand,” Uncle Peter said, looking up from some work he was doing. “These Illicit Diamond Buyers don’t seem to have any check on the numbers of stones they send by runner. Look at the night before last. . . .”

“Uncle Peter, what did really happen?” Simon stammered with excitement. “Uncle Peter, do tell us, please? We’ve only heard Jennifer’s version so far.”

“As you know, Dr. Foster took four of the better stones out; the other four he put back. Well, I was watchman that night, and quite early on Serafino came into the yard to collect his swag. He didn’t look in the least upset because there were so few. There is always the chance that the person he hands them on to may know how many to expect. We may get some idea about that from the messenger, when he gets back.”

“Did the messenger leave immediately after Serafino, Daddy. It would be awful if he lost him, just when things are turning out so well for us,” Charles said.

“He went off shortly before dawn. He wasn’t in uniform, of course. We knew that Serafino had to collect his load of fish because he hadn’t got it with him when he called here. So we allowed time for that, and we also allowed time for the fact that the messenger had a reliable cycle. I lent him mine, which is in reasonably good condition. I didn’t want him to be held up because of punctures or a broken chain.”

“I don’t know how I can bear to wait, Uncle Peter,”

Simon exclaimed. "It's awful having to mess about, just waiting to have all our theories shattered!"

"I see no reason why they should be. In fact I seem more confident than you are now, about it all."

Aileen said: "That's easy for you, Daddy, you've got plenty of work to do."

"Have you been busy? Whatever can you find to do at Chiengi?" Jennifer asked.

"I've had two very busy days in Court," Uncle Peter told them. "You all seem to have forgotten about the old witch doctor and his friends; but I haven't! I've been holding a preliminary enquiry into his case. There is overwhelming evidence against him, of course."

"And what happens to him next?" somebody asked.

"Oh, he'll be sent in to Kasama to await the High Court." Then Uncle Peter added, thoughtfully, "I think when the messenger returns from following Serafino to Johnstone Falls, we shall have to go back to Mporokoso. I'm just trying to plan things out in my mind."

"By tomorrow," Dr. Foster said, "we should have the full story of the smugglers. I think I'll write it all down because if we do get a favourable report on the stones we sent away, it will be a help to the police to know exactly what has been going on."

"I hope you've decided to return with us, Dr. Foster," Auntie Kay said gaily.

"Please do!"

"Oh, you must!"

"We shall be terribly disappointed if you leave us now." The four children milled around Dr. Foster, shouting. Uncle Peter laughed and said: "You see, we've all made your mind up for you!" Dr. Foster took off his glasses and polished them carefully. He held them up to the light to look for marks on the lenses before he put them on again.

"Well, I'm glad that's all settled," Aileen twittered in a matter-of-fact voice, which made them all laugh hilariously once again.

Dr. Foster looked happy, and smiled. Jennifer wondered why he didn't look queer any more. "I know," she said to herself, "it's because he's a friend of ours now and friends never look peculiar because you've got used to them and you like them."

Jennifer was sad to think that she would be returning to Mporokoso so soon, not because she wasn't happy there, but it would mean that they were getting towards the end of their holidays. "I wish we were staying here for ages and ages," she sighed.

"Going back is nothing to be depressed about," her Uncle said. "When you get home think of all the interesting things you'll have to tell people about, and all you'll have learnt while you've been away."

"Yes, I expect they will ask us to write an essay on our summer holidays when we get back to school."

"I wonder what you will write about, Jennifer. It is sure to be a long essay, anyway."

"Oh, I shall just deal with one subject, like the animals and all these lovely birds we see every day. I could do a drawing, too, of the little weaver birds' nests, with their tiny front doors, which we've been watching on the bamboos in the yard."

"Lions and tigers and things, that's what mine will be about," Simon said rather aggressively.

"No tigers in Africa, silly. Leopard and elephant, jackal and hyaena," Charles said. "I know Jennifer doesn't like hyaena; but the other day, when Daddy stopped my little lecture on this sinister animal, I had some other quite interesting things about him to tell you." He turned to Jennifer. "This will make your school essay really exciting; why not give your form mistress some worth-while information."

"Well, I just don't want to hear it," Jennifer said as she prepared to flounce out of the room.

"Go away then, and I'll tell Simon." Her cousin gave her a naughty grin; the kind of look calculated to make any

schoolgirl furious. With great self-control Jennifer pretended not to notice. "At thirteen, you don't allow a fifteen-year-old cousin to pull your leg—and a boy at that!" she muttered to herself.

Charles ignored her. "Up at Abercorn," he said, "that is a little place near the most southern tip of Lake Tanganyika, there is a pretty little township perched high up in the hills. There is also a small lake which the local sailing club use. Lake Chila is really beautiful and there are no 'croc's' there. So, if the bottom falls out of your home-made boat, your only worry is to swim to shore. You don't see large tooth-fringed jaws smiling to welcome you. But you musn't imagine that the yachtsman's life is free from care. Africa isn't like that. At night the hyaena come along and chew the boats, or the ropes, or the sails. They've been known to do endless damage."

Dr. Foster had been listening and said: "It's not only boats they destroy. As you know, my final destination on this journey is Mweru wa Ntipa—the Mweru swamp. There are one or two rest-huts there which our people use. Hyaena came along one night and stole the skin rug off the floor. The really infernal piece of cheek, however, was this. They chewed up the wood and canvas from two of the veranda chairs as well! I agree with Jennifer, though, that you have chosen quite the most unattractive of all Africa's animals as the subject of your lecture, Charles."

There was an old legend, Dr. Foster told them, about the hyaena. In the days before tales were written, and all animals looked very much alike, they talked and thought as people do. There was once a leopard, so the story said, who was very handsome indeed. He owed his beauty to a tortoise who, in gratitude for a kindness which the leopard had once done him, wove a magic spell. It was a very special spell for which the tortoise used his very best prescription. He made the leopard a silky coat, a beautiful cat-like face and a lissom elegant body.

When the hyaena saw what the tortoise had done for

the leopard, he too asked to be made beautiful. Now the tortoise did not have the same feeling of gratitude towards the hyaena but agreed to see what could be done. The hyaena made it quite clear that he was not really dissatisfied with his looks; but he would like that extra



'alas, the spell was only partly successful'

see page 144.

finish, the social grace which the leopard possessed. He told the tortoise how impressed he was with the leopard's beauty and asked that similar improvements be made to himself.

The little tortoise looked at him and tried to think of one kind act the hyaena had ever done for others. There seemed to be no good in him at all; but the tortoise, not wishing to be disagreeable, tried his best. He cast a

similar spell to the one he had made for the leopard; but alas, the spell was only partly successful. Certainly there were spots on his coat though the colour was not the rich amber and ebony which patterned the leopard. It was only a poor, ragged, imitation. But the tortoise did not know enough magic to change the nature of the hyaena and was quite unable to improve his face which, because of his evil deeds, remained as hideous as before.

"I think we must make Dr. Foster our official story teller," Charles said, and Simon tried to think of a suitable title for the appointment.

Dr. Foster shook his head. "No, I can't be two things. You forget that I'm official diary writer for the anti-smuggling brigade! What is more, I've got to go now and get my log-book up to date."

It was a day or two before the messenger returned from Johnstone Falls. He was dusty and tired but looked exceedingly happy. When he'd had a bath and some food, he came to tell Uncle Peter about his adventures.

"I shall try to write it down as he tells us the story," Dr. Foster said. "Then we shall have a record of it in his own words."

So, while the messenger talked, Dr. Foster wrote in his little note book. Every now and again he stopped, either to ask some question or to open his hands and stretch his fingers which had become cramped with writing. When the report reached its final form, the messenger's story read:

When the Bwana told me that Serafino had been seen in the yard, I went back to my hut to get ready for my journey. I tied my loads, and a bottle of drinking water to the carrier of the cycle, and waited there until just before five o'clock before setting off. Although I had a light, I did not require it because there was already quite a lot of brightness in the sky. So I pushed the bicycle through the trees near the Boma and then came out onto the main pathway and began to ride. It is easy to go a long way in the early morning because it is cool. Because of the dew

there is very little dust. My new shotgun, which I have just bought after saving up for three years, was slung over my shoulder. I thought how good it would be if I could kill a buck and bring back some relish.

It was about nine o'clock when I sat down to have some food and a rest. The day was getting warmer, so I let some of the air out of my tyres because they were getting too hard and I did not want to have a burst.

Much later in the day, I was wondering how long I should have to go before catching up with Serafino, when I saw some distance ahead an African sitting by the roadside. I could see that he was mending his cycle and that he had taken the back wheel off. I slowed down as I reached him and then I got off to see if I could be of any help. He was working very hard, and he had a big load on his carrier. It was Serafino.

"Mutende, Mukwai," I said. "Can I help you mend your cycle?"

"Thank you, Mukwai, I'm afraid the hub is broken and it will not be possible to do so." I looked at it carefully and saw that it was so.

"I think we shall have to try to find a place to leave it," I said. "Or would you like to stay in a hut somewhere, and I will bring you a hub, my friend, from Johnstone Falls?"

"That will never do. I cannot wait here. I have to get to Johnstone Falls to sell my fish, and then go back to Chiengi. I have to sell all the fish I can, while the weather is dry and travelling is easy. I get a good price for it. No, I shall have to walk."

"I think you could put your load on the carrier of my cycle, one wheel I can take in my hand. Do you think you can manage to carry the rest?"

So, like this we walked for some way till we came to a hut where an old man promised to look after Serafino's things till we returned. We spent the night there, and in the morning we fastened Serafino's loads with mine, on my carrier. I took him up on my crossbar. We rode like this all the way to Johnstone Falls.

Serafino was very sad, and he was worried; but I said I would

take him round and help him sell his fish, as I had only one thing to do there myself. He kept saying how he must hurry and that as soon as his fish was sold he must go to a place where he knew he could buy a new hub.

We soon sold all the fish and Serafino made about £4. I could tell, because I had helped him to sell it. We did not bother to fasten the empty fish basket and the old sack on the carrier again, and we walked over to the place where he said he could buy spare parts.

I left Serafino there, and went away, pretending that now I must do my own business. When I came back for him Serafino showed me the new hub he had bought. It was a very strong one.

Serafino then lifted his fish basket up so that I could fasten it to the carrier. It did not look as though anything was inside, but Serafino picked it up slowly as though it were heavy.

"And what have you got there now, my friend?" I asked. "What is it that takes up so little room, but seems so very heavy?"

"A few nails, Mukwai, that I bought to mend my house with."

I laughed and said, "It sounds to me as though you have a lot of money inside." So Serafino said, very quietly, "That would be very nice, Mukwai."

We rode to the hut where Serafino's broken cycle had been left. I had been doing all the work for us both, and the road had been up hill most of the way because we were climbing out of the valley. While he fitted his new hub I had a rest. This gave me a chance to look inside the fish sack to find out what kind of nails Serafino had bought for his house. I was not surprised to see that there were no nails at all; but very many half-crowns and two shilling pieces.

Presently I went outside the hut and said that I was now rested and I must be on my way and would leave him.

He thanked me for all my help and said that I was now his brother, because I had made it possible for him to sell his fish.

When the messenger finished telling the account of his journey, Uncle Peter said: "Most satisfactory. Exactly what we wanted. Thank you very much, indeed."

"And how about the new shotgun?" Simon asked.

"Nothing! I didn't see anything at all. There must have been a lot of game a little way off the road. I'm sure I could have whistled and got a duiker."

"Fancy a District Messenger even contemplating such a thing." Charles gave him a sideways glance of mock astonishment. The messenger grinned.

Simon looked puzzled. He said: "I don't understand this conversation at all."

"It's a very shady discussion—very shocking indeed!"

"Bwana Charles is making fun of me. I said I was sure I could have whistled up some game. I did not say that I had done so."

"Simon, I'll explain. The Bantu cut little reed whistles, rather like the pipes of Pan. They hide in the undergrowth and imitate the call of duiker. The innocent little creatures hear the call from a long way off and answer it. At first they are shy. Then they get a little more bold. They come a bit nearer and peep through the careful camouflage of leaves. They come into sight and—bang! Another duiker becomes someone's juicy stew."

"Rather like the story of the moth and the candle."

"Or the Pied Piper," Charles said.

Simon thought for a moment. "There's just one more thing I want to know. You talked of 'the Bantu'. Are they the same as Africans?"

"It's a collective word, which includes many African people and their languages. The way we use it, it means 'the people'; that is to say the African people."

"I've been meaning to ask you that one for ages. I've noticed that you all use the expression, quite often. I like it, especially now I know the meaning."

"How about going for a walk," Charles said, but Simon was not enthusiastic. The two boys were restless. They wandered into the house, through it, and out again so many times that Auntie Kay became really impatient with them.

"Do stop wandering about like caged animals," she said in desperation.

"I would, Mummy, if I could think of something to do," Charles replied.

"Why don't you and Simon go for a really good walk?"

"Simon isn't interested in a walk and it's dull going alone. We might have arranged a hunting party during these two or three days; but we didn't want to be away when the messenger arrived here with news of Serafino."

"Yes, I suppose it is rather difficult for any of us to settle down to anything."

"Daddy's lucky because he's got such a lot of work. Do you think we shall be allowed to stay up tonight? That hawker from Tanganyika should arrive today or tomorrow."

"I think you can forget about staying up. Daddy and Dr. Foster are now far more excited about the smugglers than any of you are, and I'm certain that they'll be on watch themselves."

Just as they had expected, the runner from Lake Tanganyika came late that night, and put more of his precious treasures into the hiding place. There were ten more stones of varying sizes, in a little skin purse which, because it had no fastener, was tied ~~up~~ in a dirty little piece of grey rag.

"Poor chap," thought Uncle Peter as he removed this squalid trophy. "I wonder what will happen to him when his employers find out that this last lot of stones hasn't reached its destination."

He agreed with Dr. Foster that this time they should take them all and send them down to the proper authorities if, and when, it was found that they really were valuable.

"I feel we should put something inside the tin to take their place, you know," Dr Foster said. "How about a nice little motto, like you find in Christmas crackers. 'Riches are gotten with pain, kept with care and lost with grief.' That would be quite appropriate. Do you think it could be translated into Chibemba?"

CHAPTER XVI

A Bush' Baby is told to Behave

“**I** get used to moving about,” Aileen said to Jennifer. “If I stayed too long in one place I should think it was terribly dull.”

“How peculiar! I like staying a long time and getting to know places well,” Jennifer replied. “I keep remembering that this wonderful holiday will soon be over. That thought does make me sad.”

“Well, you can come out here again.”

“I shall soon be doing exams and things. Simon will too. This time everybody thought it was a wonderful idea for us to come to Africa; but I’m afraid that next year they may say at school that it would be ‘too unsettling’. They are very fond of that expression in the examination classes.”

The bustle of packing, which they had experienced before leaving Mporokoso, was now taking place at Chiengi. It was more care-free this time, because they were on the way home. It was not so easy to forget things because the house would be left empty.

“Look at this,” Jennifer called out, as she helped with the packing. “I’ve found my book,—the one I brought out here to read in my spare time. I haven’t done any reading at all; but I don’t feel as though I’d had any spare time, either. One thing’s certain. I shall never be able to read this book now.” She held it up. The cover had been nibbled and the first twenty pages torn in shreds.

“That will be the work of Goggles,” said Charles who was being completely idle. “They’re destructive little brutes, for all their appearance of innocence.”

"One of the reasons I'm not keen on having a bush-baby in the house," said Auntie Kay, "is that they break things."

"He hasn't done any damage yet, Mummy," Aileen said.

"He hasn't had much scope here, where we've only been camping. There are a lot of things at home, though, that I shouldn't want smashed. Lemurs are too closely related to monkeys, for my liking."

"But he's so sweet," Aileen said, "I know that he does sometimes bite; but that's only when he's very annoyed."

"I often feel annoyed; but I can't bite people," Auntie Kay said. "That's exactly my point. They're really creatures of the wilds."

As there were two cars to take them home, and the carriers, there were three separate stacks of luggage.

"It is reasonably easy to arrange transport for inanimate things," Uncle Peter said wearily, "but I boggle at trying to decide who the passengers will be in each vehicle."

"You mustn't forget that Sooty and Goggles have to have lifts too," Aileen reminded him. "I think they would both like the Landrover best."

"Aileen," her father said sternly, "has this preference which has been expressed by your pets anything to do with the fact that you, too, haven't been in the Landrover?"

Aileen's face turned red. "Don't be silly, Daddy. Of course not! At least, not altogether," she added, for she usually told the truth.

When, finally, they set out for Mporokoso with Dr. Foster and Auntie Kay, Aileen took Sooty in a basket on her knee and Jennifer tucked Goggles inside her jersey and two better behaved travellers could hardly have been found. Even Charles, who had to share the back of the car with them, said that their conduct had been admirable.

The Landrover reached home without mishap in a very short while.

The passengers on the Boma truck were varied. Two messengers sat on tin trunks, with their backs to the cab. This gave them a dominant view over the others. After a lot of commotion and talking two dejected-looking figures settled down at the other end. These were Mulenga the village headman and the old witch doctor, huddled up in his army greatcoat. They sat on sacks of food, which, collected at Chiengi were being taken to feed the Boma labourers at Mporokoso.

The Second Messenger took off his fez and adjusted the box of cigarettes and matches, and the piece of string that he kept inside it. Having rearranged them, he bent down and put his fez back on his head, his smart appearance and the jaunty angle of his hat belying its hidden load. The Head Messenger carried a safety razor in a box as well as a handkerchief inside his fez; but he preferred not to share this secret with the rest of the world. It saved him from having bulges in his pockets which would spoil the military precision of his appearance.

Lazalo and Cookie jumped into the back of the lorry, so did one or two of the carriers who were not fit or not required to carry loads back to Mporokoso Boma.

Some fourteen drab native chickens were squawking and muttering in a crowded basket. This had a round base, loosely thonged with strips of bark, and the top was bell-shaped and made in the same way. It looked like some withering skeleton from a nightmare belfry. This was perched at an angle, precariously, on the top of three bags of Chiengi salt. It was worth buying salt at Chiengi, as there were primitive salt pans there, and it could be purchased at a low price for use at Mporokoso.

As they jogged along through the bush the hard springs in the seat of the truck shot the passengers up and down, until Simon decided to sit forward because the knobs of his vertebrae were rubbing on the hot leatherette at the back.

"I can make a cushion at your back," Uncle Peter said, "with folded clothes and my jersey."

"That would certainly be more comfortable, but far too hot, I'm afraid," Simon replied, wriggling forward.

The road was bad and rough, for it was only a minor road and seldom used by heavy traffic. The bonnet of the truck shook and clattered as they went over the uneven surface. Presently the driver stopped. He pointed to the jet of hissing steam coming out of the radiator.

"It's no good, Bwana. We shall have to wait for it to cool down. There was quite a big hole in it when I came back from Kasama the other day."

"Have you tried to mend it since then?" Uncle Peter asked.

"Yes, Bwana, with solder; but it must have gone again."

"There's some 'bunga' in the back of the truck. When the radiator cools down we'll put some in."

Simon jumped down, followed by Uncle Peter, who pointed to one of the sacks of food.

"There's some native flour in there, Lazalo. Take some of it out for us please." Lazalo took the lid of a basket which looked like a porridge plate without a rim, and scooped some meal into it.

In the meantime, by using an old rag to save himself from the jets of steam, the driver removed the radiator cap. Uncle Peter put in a handful of 'bunga', as he called the meal and then the radiator was filled with water. Simon thought this a most astonishing action. His Uncle saw the look of amusement on his face.

"Well, that's the best local radiator cement I know. Presently, when the water boils again, the porridge will start to cook inside the radiator, and it will fill up the cracks and stop the leak."

"I can't help wondering what Henry Ford would say," Simon remarked.

"He would admire our ingenuity, Simon!"

With a rattle and a jerk the truck jumped forward, and having decided to move again, settled down to an uncomfortable but steady 30 miles an hour.

"If we could go faster, we wouldn't feel the bumps, Simon; but as things are I think we're lucky to be moving in the right direction at all." After a while there was a 'phut, phut' sound coming from the radiator.

"The porridge has cooked," Uncle Peter said. "We must put some more water in before it seizes up." Simon noticed a very nasty smell of burning! So, off came the radiator cap again, and the very last drop of spare water was poured in.

"I don't want to have to resort to using drinking water. That is the last thing I'm prepared to get rid of in the bush," Uncle Peter said.

"I think," the driver commented thoughtfully, "that we can reach that river bed at the foot of the big hill. The water there has nearly dried up, but we can get enough to fill one of the spare bottles and from it, the radiator again."

So they rattled along slowly until, once more, there was a smell of burning porridge. "We'd better stop," Uncle Peter said. "It very soon heats up at mid-day."

"All this worry about water has made me terribly thirsty," Simon complained. So he took a long drink from the watersack which had been hanging on the doorhandle where it kept wonderfully cool. The African passengers, too, were thirsty. So a calabash was produced for Lazalo to fill from a second sack. When they had finished, Uncle Peter prodded both watersacks to see how much remained, and decided that he'd better, after all, put some more in the radiator.

"We won't have very much left. This is an eventuality I didn't foresee. Well, it all depends now on how soon we reach a fresh supply."

The truck rattled off once more, and without further mishap they found more water in one of the muddy pools

of the river bed and began to climb the escarpment on to the plateau. Although the road was rough with boulders, the day was getting cooler and travelling, though perilous, was no longer uncomfortable.

"We won't be back before dark now," Uncle Peter said. "The others will have given up all hope of our return."

"I suppose the Landrover ~~just~~ skips along," said Simon, ruefully.

Once up on the high ground the truck driver managed to increase his speed. Presently he switched on the lights. He pointed to a fourteen-inch stick, picked out in the headlights of the car, standing at an angle of forty-five degrees across the roadway. He pulled up, and they got out to have a look. It was a stick insect, a really large one that looked like an animated poker and tongs. With each step it took, the whole rickety frame jerked. After each movement it seemed to brace itself for the next. It had arms like the outrigger on a dentist's drill and it rubbed its emaciated hands together. It was a brown colour, exactly like any of the dried twigs lying everywhere around.

"We'd never have recognised it in daylight," Simon said. His uncle looked at the creature thoughtfully. "No, we shouldn't. It is rather sad the way modern inventions like car lights expose nature's more fraudulent enterprises."

It was not long after this that they reached home. Dr. Foster and Auntie Kay were just preparing a rescue expedition in the Landrover.

"You were so long, I thought the old lorry had refused to climb the hill," Dr. Foster said. "We've packed ropes, spades, picks, food, water, and some extra jerseys."

"And my first-aid box and a torch," added Auntie Kay. "But I'm very glad we haven't got to use any of it. I suggest we leave it all, and unpack again in the morning."

While they were talking, Aileen ran out of the sitting room with Goggles perched on her shoulder. He was looking wise and good; but Aileen was far from happy. She held her hands behind her back.

"Mummy," she whispered, "which hand will you have?"

"Oh, I don't know. Either hand," said her mother, as she collected one or two of her more valuable possessions from the car. "The left one then!" she added, realising that she was expected to make a choice.

"Prrrsss! Prrrsss!!" jeered Goggles, jumping from one shoulder to the other. He was tremendously entertained and having a hearty laugh. Aileen held up the lid of a small china sweet dish that her mother kept in the sitting-room. It was broken in five pieces.

"Goggles has eaten all the sweets too, Mummy. He only threw the lid on the floor because he was cross with me for catching him stealing."

Auntie Kay shook her fist at Goggles in a very angry way. He did not seem to mind in the very least and hopped from Aileen's shoulder to the top of the door, where he sat, making it quite impossible for them to shut it.

"Mischievous brute," Auntie Kay muttered. Uncle Peter looked up at him and said: "You'd better mind your Ps and Qs, my friend."

CHAPTER XVII

Diamonds

JENNIFER sat on the veranda, in a comfortable chair with her legs dangling over one of its arms. It was too hot to play tennis now in the middle of the day. In any case she found the court difficult to play on. It was a hard court, a dirty grey colour, with a very tough, cement-like surface made of mashed-up ant hill clay which seemed as hard as concrete. At this particular moment, Jennifer could think of nothing really important to do.

Aileen lay on a rug, drinking fresh orange juice and iced water. Even on the most far away outstations there was ice because everyone had paraffin refrigerators. "I wish I knew how they worked," mused Jennifer. "Fancy putting a tiny flame under the thing, in order to make ice. I shall have to ask Miss Brown about it when I get back to school." Miss Brown was her science teacher. Jennifer usually found science dull; but sometimes the lessons were interesting and explained some incident in every-day life. She would remember to ask about refrigerators.

"I wish I had something to do," sighed Aileen. "What on earth can I do?"

"Read a book, or just think. There's a lot to think about," Jennifer said. "That's what I am doing. As a matter of fact I've been sitting here wishing that Dr. Foster hadn't sent our supposed diamonds away so quickly. I could have tried them on a window, and if they'd scratched it easily, we'd have known they were real."

Charles was sitting on the steps of the porch, rubbing the butt of a .22 rifle with linseed oil. "Got to keep it well oiled in the dry weather," he muttered.

"If you're getting ready to shoot this legendary lion everyone is complaining about, that .22 won't be much good," Simon said.

"I'm not sure that it is a legend," Charles remarked, rubbing an oily finger on his khaki shorts. Africans are usually correct about these things. It means a lot to them, to be able to go out and about without the fear of wild animals."

"That grave over there under the trees is a grim warning to would-be lion hunters, isn't it?"

Charles shrugged his shoulders. "I don't pretend that it is pleasant to be mauled by lion, but your chances of recovery are far better today than they were then, when that man was killed. They pump penicillin into you and you very soon mend," Charles reassured him.

"Have you heard about the 'Nkalamo', Bwana Charles?" Lazalo asked. They had not noticed Lazalo coming on to the porch, and looked round in surprise. "It is quite true. It must be an old lion, I think, because it does not go very far. Last night it killed several sheep in the cattle kraal. It broke the door in."

"I suppose my father knows," Charles said.

Hurrying across from the offices, towards the house, was a Boma clerk. The people watching from the veranda knew he was a clerk because he had on the white drill uniform provided by the Government for its employees. He walked briskly and as he approached the house, he said something to Lazalo in Chibemba. Lazalo pointed to the little round guest house, about fifty yards from the main building.

The clerk went over and tapped on the door. Dr. Foster came out and was handed a piece of paper, which he began to read.

The children watched carefully to see what would

happen. They had nothing much to do and any diversion was welcome. Dr. Foster looked at the paper for some moments and then took off his glasses and rubbed them. "He always does that when he can't believe his eyes. That's just what he did when he first saw Charles and me sitting up in the tree," Simon observed.

Dr. Foster came across to the house. He had a broad smile on his face. He handed the piece of paper to Charles and rubbed his hands with glee. "There now!" he said with satisfaction.

Simon and Jennifer looked over Charles's shoulder. Aileen wasn't quite tall enough, so she tried to look through the paper from underneath; but the writing appeared back to front and she was most annoyed. "Read it out, do!" she entreated Charles. "I can't see."

Charles held the paper out as though he were a town crier announcing a Royal Succession. He cleared his throat.

"This is a telegram," he said, "from Dr. Foster's analyst friend on the Copperbelt. It says: 'Samples received first water Tanganyika diamonds stop. If you find a few more you need never do a day's work again.' The telegram is signed 'Jimmy.'" The children looked at each other in silence. They were absolutely amazed. Although each one of them kept saying they believed they'd discovered smugglers, no one had ever honestly believed it would be true.

Aileen broke the silence. She began to jump up and down with excitement, and went on saying "hurray" until she bumped her elbow against the wall. Her cries of joy then gave way to yells of "Ooo" and "Ow." Charles, Simon and Jennifer began to cheer and went on shouting until the commotion brought Auntie Kay out from the house. Charles handed the piece of paper to his mother. She read it. "This is exciting," she said. "Does your father know?"

"What's 'first water' mean, Dr. Foster?" Simon asked. "The telegram says 'first water Tanganyika diamonds.'" "

"That means really good ones. First grade, not little tiddlers used for making tools. The kind of diamonds that adorn princesses and film stars."

"I wonder if they were being smuggled to send to a princess," Aileen said.

"I don't think so," her mother replied. "Princesses don't encourage smugglers. They were going to be sold, in all probability, to someone who wasn't too particular about keeping laws. The buyer would know where to get them cut into pretty shapes, and they would then be sold again to some gangster to wear in his tie-pin."

"I don't think he'd have a tie-pin, Mummy," Charles said. "The gangsters in this part of the world don't wear ties very often. Probably he'd have it sunk into a large ring."

It was lunch time, and they could see Uncle Peter coming across from his office. The weather was far hotter now, and as he sauntered over, he flicked at stray flies with his ivory handled switch. He carried his jacket suspended from one finger, slung over his shoulder.

Simon and Charles ran out to meet him. There was so much noise that Uncle Peter hadn't the least idea what they were trying to tell him. He came up the steps and went into the house where he held up his hands to quell the riot which seemed to have broken out. "Can you tell me, Kay, what all this is about?"

Dr. Foster handed him his telegram. When Uncle Peter read it he looked around him at the four happy people. "I do think I've got clever youngsters in my family! I'm so glad you have been proved right. Now, let's sit down and talk things over."

It was decided that as tomorrow was the day the mail lorry went into Kasama, Dr. Foster's report and the remaining samples should be sent to what Uncle Peter called the "proper authorities."

"Who are they?" Aileen asked. "They sound such dull people."

"Well, they are very proper; but not in the least dull," Uncle Peter replied. "This is a matter for the police now, the branch called the Criminal Investigation Department, Aileen."

"Do you have a C.I.D. out in Africa?" Jennifer asked. "I only thought of them as people in England, sitting in little boats dragging rivers, or taking photographs of the scene of a crime."

Uncle Peter laughed. "They look more like rather jolly tobacco farmers out here," he said.

"Why haven't we seen tobacco farmers?" Jennifer asked.

"Because we aren't in a tobacco-growing area; but there are huge tobacco farms in the south and east of this territory. There are three different worlds, really, in Northern Rhodesia. There are the rural areas, where we live now. Then there are the tobacco-growing and farming regions. These are along the line of rail and in Fort Jameson. There you see huge barns for tobacco curing and vast cultivated fields. Lastly there is the Copperbelt. This is the industrial area and where the famous copper mines are. This is where money is made and commerce flourishes. You will see it on your way home to England, Jennifer. It is as different from Mporokoso as the City of London is from the Yorkshire moors."

They continued their discussion over lunch. It was only afterwards that the question of the lion arose.

Uncle Peter said: "It's already done enough damage. We'll try and get it this evening."

"I hope we do because this will have to be my last evening here," Dr. Foster said. "Now I've had my reply from Jimmy I shall have to go off and join my colleagues in locust land."

The children were terribly disappointed and wanted him to remain a while longer. "You seem to forget that I'm not really interested in diamonds at all. I was curious to know how your mystery would be solved; but that's

done now. You may think it very odd, but my real concern is in those locusts up on the Mweru Marsh."

"Well, you proved a first-class detective, as well." Simon's admiration rang in his voice.

"I don't think, once we got on the track of these people, that it was so difficult. Diamond smugglers often use most complicated methods. Some years ago it was forbidden to import parrots from the Congo. This was because a certain parrot dealer fed diamonds to the parrots and, once over the border, his accomplice killed the birds and took the stones out of their stomachs."

"I read about another exciting discovery, too," said Simon. "There was a glass vase sent from Europe to America by air. The sides of the packing case had been hollowed out and diamonds inserted in the empty spaces in the wood. They found this out by using X-rays."

"I think our smugglers were very simple people; but they were doing very well out of it," Dr. Foster said: "There was only one stumbling block. They didn't expect that anyone was going to stay in the Chiengi house. How disgusted they must have been when they found us there!"

Before Uncle Peter went back to the office he had a talk with the Head Messenger about the lion. There were several carcasses left from last night's raid, and the messenger was sure the lion would return to them when he felt hungry again.

"There's an ant hill, with a tree in it, not far from where the lion broke in. I think we could watch from there," Uncle Peter said.

"I thought ants were a nuisance in Africa, Uncle Peter?"

"They are, Jennifer. They're a perpetual menace."

"Well. I do think they are useful too. I hear of so many things you use ant hill for; brickmaking, surfacing tennis courts, and now as a look-out post for lions."

"True, they do have their uses; but there are disadvantages too, even as observation posts. Snakes hide up in them, and wild animals. Leopards creep round in their

shade furtively looking for prey. You have to climb ant hills very warily."

In the evening they examined the ant hill most carefully when they were out for their walk. They crossed the garden, the vegetable garden and skirted round the now half empty swimming pool towards the cattle kraal. This was down hill from the Boma garden and partly hidden by the banana plantation. The kraal was surrounded by thick timber palings planted closely together. Stuck in a bark rope binding, woven round the top of the palisade, were sharp spikes of hardwood, pointing outwards to impale any creatures that tried to vault over them. Jennifer thought the kraal looked like some of the palisades which the ancient Britons were said to have built for exactly the same reason—protection from wild animals.

At once place there was a gap in the spikes. They were broken and flat. This was the small space made by the lion as he jumped over. He must have rested for a second on the spikes. They went round to look for blood spoor, in the hope that the lion might have cut his foot, but they found no such marks in the loose, dry earth. The door to the sheep pen was broken down and Jennifer looked inside. Here was a scene of devastation. Scattered around were skulls, bones, pieces of sheep skin and three dead sheep as yet uneaten. She ran out again quickly. "How horrible," she said, "I feel quite ill. Let's go!"

Charles and Simon were more interested in plans for hunting the lion than in the pathetic remnants of the sheep. They ran over to the ant hill. It was about ten feet high and shaped like a seaside sand castle. Towards the top and at a slant, there sprouted a crippled tree which spread its branches down one side like a tattered cloak.

"That's a wonderful place to watch from, Uncle Peter," said Simon, who noticed that there was a clear view across the grass to the gap in the wooden wall round the kraal.

"Can't I watch up there with the messengers, Uncle Peter? If I don't manage to get my school colours, it would be very useful to have shot a lion."

His Uncle laughed. "I expect it would be 'useful,' as you call it, Simon; but in the bush we don't take lion shooting light-heartedly. Lion are classed as vermin here!"

"Vermin? I thought rats and mice were vermin," said Jennifer, looking very surprised.

"I think you will find the dictionary says that animals and birds injurious to game and crops are vermin. So the actual species will vary in different lands."

"It seems very rude, to me, to call the king of beasts by a name like that, Uncle Peter."

"He's no king. He's just an old pirate," her Uncle replied. "Look at the damage he's done. Think of how frightened the local people must be in their village down there, knowing this fellow's about."

Simon looked at his uncle again. He put on his best 'disappointed' look. "I should like to try to get him," he said. "After all, I shoot for my House at school."

"Simon, I'm sorry. It's far too dangerous and you'd never get any colours at all if you were mauled. The people out here have had generations of experience, and I've helped to get quite a few. Lions always make me feel very respectful, which no doubt accounts for their title of King. They look bigger, you know, when you meet them on the ground than when you see them in a built up cage at the Zoo."

"Smugglers are much more fun," Simon said with emphasis.

Restrained and silent, they sauntered back again towards the house. Disappointment was heavy on the air. Aileen who was playing in the garden, asked them how they'd enjoyed themselves. There was little response to this. "No good ever came of going for walks," she said. "I've had much more fun here with Sooty. I've made her a

'mouse' out of paper, and I'm dragging it along on a piece of black cotton. She hasn't the faintest idea how it moves, because she can't see the thread. We've had a wonderful game."

A somewhat exhausted little cat was lying, full length on the paving stone path. She raised her head when her name was mentioned, and then quickly put it down again. She was not asleep, and when Alleen joined the others to go indoors, she could not resist running after this piece of paper which followed some ten yards behind the family in such a tantalizing way.

Dr. Foster was waiting for them. All his luggage was packed, and he had in his hand a few letters which he had written before going out of reach of mail lorries for quite a while. Tomorrow, in the early morning, he would be gone. At least he thought so then.

It was not, as it happened, the solitary, early departure that Dr. Foster expected. He had just packed his remaining belongings into a suitcase, and put his cameras, fly switch and a book on the top, when he heard footsteps hurrying past the guest house.

For half an hour or so there had been quick excited drumming from the village, and the feeling of tenseness was catching.

"I wonder what's happening," Dr. Foster thought. "I wish I knew the various drum beats; those are probably lion drums. They sound urgent enough."

He opened the door and looked out. He took a deep breath because the rawness of the early morning took him unawares. One of the messengers, his tough boots crunching on the gravel path, was hurrying towards the main house. Two other Africans followed him. They were carrying spears and a hoe. Dr. Foster could hear them talking to someone; but not clearly enough to know what it was about. There seemed to be some excitement afoot. He put on his old jersey and walked over.

Charles, already dressed, was out on the veranda.

"They've wounded the lion, but they haven't got him yet," he called to Dr. Foster.

"Have the messengers any idea where he is?"

"They think he's hiding in the long grass behind the banana plantation." At this moment Simon came out. He was pushing himself into an unwilling pullover, which he finally conquered, emerging somewhat tousled.

"My luggage is already loaded on the Landrover, but no matter. How about you two coming in it and we'll have a look?"

"Marvellous!" Simon said. "Do you think we'll get a chance to shoot him?"

"My father is just coming, too. Shall we wait?" asked Charles.

Uncle Peter joined them and they all climbed on the car. "I only want a lift as far as the banana patch. A messenger told me the lion didn't appear till early this morning. They shot and wounded him as he approached the kraal. I don't like having wounded lions about the Boma."

Dr. Foster drove across the grass and on to the footpath which led to the swimming pool. "This will do, thank you. I'll get off here," said Uncle Peter, as he got down and hurried away to join the Africans who, armed with guns, spears, sticks and hoes, were beating through the bush.

The two boys jumped out of the car and joined a group of people who were standing about. They were showing each other dark spots, at unequal intervals, which made a track towards the long grass.

"Blood," said Simon, making the word sound as savage as he could. "He must have been wounded quite badly." He walked off, following the blood spoor. Dr. Foster, seeing his intention, got into the car again and creeping along behind Simon called out "No!" Simon stopped. "Come on Charles, let's grab him!" They each put a hand under Simon's arm and hoisted him up beside them.

"Now we can drive round the edge of the grass and have a proper look. Is the door properly fastened?"

They had only gone a little way, when there was a noisy grunt, a huge roar. They could see a sand-coloured animal moving through the dry, dead grass. The hunters closed in. A rifle cracked. Then, in contrast to this harsh sound there came, breathless, muffled cheering from the onlookers.

"Who got him?" shouted Simon, to the first person he could see. "Katwishi—I don't know," was the reply. The three of them got down and followed the crowd. There were about twenty Africans and Uncle Peter, standing round, looking with awe at the huge beast.

"Who shot him, Daddy?" Charles asked. "Did you?"

"It's a beautiful creature, isn't it?" said his father. "The Head Messenger got him."

Simon went over and prodded the great paws with his foot. He looked at the enormous white teeth and cruel jaw.

"If I couldn't have the fun of shooting it myself, I'd rather the Head Messenger got him, than any other person," Simon said, looking round. Then he spotted the messenger and called out "Well done! How many lions does this make?"

"Only my third," he replied with the genuine modesty of one who knew the African bush. "There are a lot of people who have shot many more than that."

CHAPTER XVIII

The Bush Baby Leaves in a Hurry

"THERE comes a time in all holidays, when you have to think of going back," Auntie Kay said, pouring herself some coffee.

"Oh, I know. I've been dreading this moment," said Jennifer, dully.

"But you must want to see your mother and father!"

"Of course I do, Auntie Kay, and I love school. It's just that we are having such a wonderful time."

"Well, we are going to make your journey back as interesting as we can, too. Your Uncle and I have talked it over and we feel you must see some of the Copper mines and the big towns. We haven't time to go down the Zambezi, or to see the Victoria Falls, but you would have a very false impression of this country if you only saw Kasama, Mporokoso and Chiengi. This isn't only an African's country either. People from Europe and people from India also have their homes here. Some of them, and indeed some of their parents now, were born here and know no other part of the world."

"We've only seen Africans, so far."

"That's exactly my point!"

Auntie Kay said she wished Uncle Peter and Dr. Foster would bring the boys back for breakfast. "I get tired of these wild animal scares. Everyone gets so excited and nothing gets done in the house."

"This isn't just a scare, Mummy," Aileen remarked.



' There were about twenty Africans and Uncle Peter, s



standing round, looking with awe at the huge beast.'

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"This is the real thing. Haven't you heard the lion drums? I think it's all rather a nuisance. I wanted to take Sooty out to play in the garden before breakfast and Lazalo made me stay inside. He said it was dangerous because all the people were out with their guns."

Someone ran up the steps and into the house at top speed. "I've come to fetch my camera," Simon said. "You'd better bring yours, too, Jennie."

"Why? Have you found something interesting?"

"The lion, of course. Couldn't you hear the cheering when the Head Messenger shot him?"

"We haven't heard a thing, Simon. The wind must be blowing the wrong way. Are you sure the lion is quite dead?"

"It certainly is—it's very dead, Auntie Kay! It will make the most wonderful picture, lying there in the long grass. Charles says I must hurry, so that I can get a photograph before the Bantu start cutting bits off it to make into charms."

"What kind of charms do they make, Auntie Kay?"

"I'm afraid I don't know, Jennifer; but I do know that once some garden boys here sold bits of Aileen's hair which had blown about after I'd cut it. They pretended it was lion hair and they were making quite a lot of money."

Lazalo came into the room with more coffee and some more boiled eggs. "I thought I heard the Bwanas coming back, Mama," he said.

"I'm afraid not, Lazalo; but they've got the lion. So goodness knows when we'll have breakfast now."

"The lion—takuli? Killed?" he enquired. Auntie Kay said "Yes."

Without further ado, Lazalo put the coffee and eggs on the table and went to tell Cookie and the rest of the staff. In a trice, they were all running down the garden to see the fun.

"We may as well forget about breakfast," Auntie Kay said. "Let's go too."

So, with Aileen and Jennifer she joined the throng which had gathered beyond the banana patch. Everyone was very excited, some of the Africans were dancing, some laughing and shouting.

"Just another dead lion," Aileen said as she walked away. "I think I'll go and see if any more strawberries are ready in the garden. We haven't had any since the day before yesterday."

"This is awfully exciting," Jennifer said, as she moved closer and closer so that she could get as much of the lion as possible into her photograph. The head had been propped up with a stout piece of wood, so it looked almost as though the lion were still alive. Jennifer said: "I feel sorry for it now. I didn't think it was to be pitied yesterday, I'll admit, when I saw what had happened to the sheep."

"And you feel less sorry, when you see what a lion can do to people," her Uncle said.

"Good morning, Mrs. Plender! So much for my early start." Dr. Foster came out of the crowd to greet Auntie Kay. He laughed and shook his head. "I think there's a conspiracy to keep me from my work."

"I find that in the bush one gets like the Bantu. They never make plans, and very wise they are."

"Exactly. So they don't have to hustle to keep up with their ideas."

"One thing to be said for your late start; you'll be able to have a good meal before you go. I never believe in starting a day's journey on tea and toast!"

"Food!" shouted Charles. "Lovely grub—come on Simon! Let's have breakfast."

"I'm as hungry as a—I was going to say lion! I'm as hungry as a leopard," laughed Simon. "Suppose we see if we can race the Landrover back to the house." In spite of an uphill run they reached home about the same time, for the car waited to pick up Uncle Peter and the two girls.

"I'll be along in a second," Uncle Peter said. "I must get some of these warm clothes off first."

So Auntie Kay went out to the back veranda to fetch more milk and Jennifer and Aileen went into the dining room. There was silence in the house, except for Uncle Peter banging doors and a scooping sound which Auntie Kay made with a measure, as she took some milk from a shallow dish in the pantry.

"Jennifer—come and take the milk in for me, and I'll go and see if there's any more coffee on the fire. We won't have any of our staff back for ages."

Jennifer went out at once. "Is anything the matter?" her aunt asked her, as she handed over the jug. "You look a bit shaken." For a moment Jennifer said nothing. Then she laughed, and even she thought what a silly mirthless sound it was. Then they heard Dr. Foster, as he came in from the guest house. He walked into the dining room to join the others. He was such a quiet person that Auntie Kay and Uncle Peter knew something must be very wrong when he let out a bellow: "My goodness! You little horror. Get out of here at once!"

Auntie Kay, the milk measure still in her hand, came to the doorway to see what was the matter. The flower vase in the centre of the table was on its side and a great pool of water made an enormous patch of grey on the white breakfast cloth. At the end of the table the coffee pot lay beside its broken spout, the coffee oozing off the table's edge on to the floor. The eggs, which Lazalo brought in before going to see the lion, were broken open and the yolks mashed and spread on every remaining patch of table cloth and the seats of two chairs. At the end of the table there was a chair with arms, and on the back a small, big eyed creature with a long tail sat and stared. It was chewing a piece of egg and a chip of egg-shell had stuck to its whiskers.

"Get out of here, you little devil," called Uncle Peter, making a dive for Goggles, who jumped with much skill to the picture rail.

"Charles, bring a stick and get this creature down."

But it wasn't necessary because Charles jumped up on a side table and caught him.

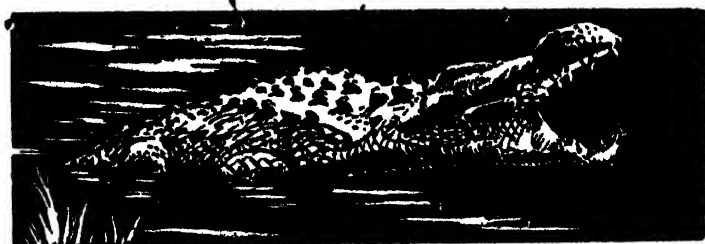
"He knows he's been naughty," Aileen said with glee. "He's really very clever."

"As the Africans say—he's been 'too clever,' " her mother snapped.

Aileen was right. Goggles was clever, for he escaped from Charles, skipped through the doorway, across the hall and into the garden. Jennifer and Charles rushed after him, but he was too quick for them and had disappeared before they reached him.

Simon said: "Well, Auntie Kay, this solves the problem of who's to look after Goggles when we go away next week."

Auntie Kay said that this was the very last wild animal she would ever have inside the house as a pet. "The very last," she muttered with emphasis, as she went into the sitting room to recover her temper. Aileen followed her and quietly slipped an arm through her mother's. She looked up with big hazel eyes. "Mummy darling," she said, "are silkworms wild animals?"



CHAPTER XIX

By Road through the Belgian Congo

THE weekly mail bus service from Mporokoso to the Copperbelt was run by a firm which had pioneered road transport before there were any roads, and which had carried mail and merchandise to places previously accessible only on foot.

The arrival of the mail bus was an event. It marked the slow footsteps of time, otherwise unobserved in places like Mporokoso. Letters from relatives at home, the six-weeks-old magazines and newspapers, a fresh supply of ammunition for a gun, the long awaited toy for some child, all depended for the last few hundred miles of their journey on this slender link. For many years there had been mail lorries, huge, lumbering things in which passengers and freight had to be hardy in order to survive.

In the early days, the owners of the firm drove the lorries themselves, enduring astonishing hardships and showing remarkable skill at mechanical improvisation. Later they trained African drivers and mechanics, and

retired themselves to modern offices, where they directed their many enterprises from large mahogany desks.

During recent years passenger lorries had given place to buses. These, bought from firms in Britain, looked forlorn and far from home, crossing an African river on a raft, or bogged in some squelching dambo in the rains; but for Central Africa they represented luxury.

"That's the fifth suitcase," said Jennifer, as she stood with the crowd of people, watching the luggage being packed on to the bus. "Now we must find Aileen's school trunk and get that safely on." Jennifer was outside the post office with Uncle Peter, where a number of travellers were beginning to assemble.

Presently Auntie Kay came over from the house to join them. Beside her walked an elderly man, frail and bent. Jennifer thought he looked like the pictures of 'Father Time' that one saw in the papers at New Year. Mr. van Wyk lived at a mission station some fifty miles from Mporokoso, so far in the bush that the Boma seemed to him as lively and gay as a country town on market day.

"Mr. van Wyk is coming with us as far as Ndola," Auntie Kay explained. "He will go from there by train to Elizabethville, where he will have his appendix out."

"It has been, as you say 'grumbling' for a very long time," he said. "So—it must go! We are not friends any longer."

For a moment Auntie Kay paused, silently, to make a mental list of all the things she had taught herself to do in the African bush. She could now make butter, bake bread, make clothes, nurse malaria, and bath babies. She thought to herself: "I do hope I don't have to try to take out an appendix with the roadside for an operating theatre!" She said aloud instead: "I am so glad you are going to keep us company on this journey, Mr. van Wyk. I hope the mail bus will rock your appendix to sleep."

"Oh it is nothing; nothing at all, Madame. I am sure I shall be quite safe. I have had it for so long now."

"This is a bit of an undertaking for you, Kay," Uncle Peter said anxiously. "I do hope you will be all right."

"Of course I shall. What could possibly go wrong? As soon as I reach Ndola I'll pick up that car you've arranged for us to hire. Then we'll drive round and do some sightseeing."

"It's the journey I'm anxious about—from here to Ndola, Kay."

"What can possibly happen? You mustn't fuss!" Auntie Kay patted his arm. "I'll be back again in ten days or so. After all, this isn't like the old days when there was no telegraph. I can always wire you if we get held up, and we have a day or two to spare before the children have to catch their plane for England."

Lazalo, in his travelling dress of khaki drill instead of his usual white uniform, brought a picnic basket across from the house. Lazalo's small son carried a suitcase in which his own belongings had been packed for the journey.

"I never really worry when you have Lazalo with you, Kay. He's so sensible and helpful." Uncle Peter took the basket from him and placed it near their seats in the bus.

"If the weight of that is anything to go by, you must have half the store cupboard inside it, Kay," he said when he rejoined them.

"As we all have reason to remember, the only time we ever went on a long journey without extra food and drinking water, our car broke down and we had to spend the night by the roadside getting more and more hungry as the hours went by!"

"Yes, that was rather dreadful. So you've made sure this time. I do agree that an extra tin of sausages is just as important as a spare wheel."

There was, by now, a gathering of passengers and their friends standing about the bus in small groups. One elderly man, whose close cropped hair was turning white, was talking with a number of younger men who had come

to see him off. He must have been a Chief or an important headman, for when he spoke his friends listened with great attention, and their replies to him were in voices quiet with respect.

Jennifer watched them and thought what polite and courteous people the Africans are, not merely to visitors like herself, but to one another.

The conductor, who had signed for the mail bags in the post office, came out and put them on the bus. The passengers took this as an indication that they would soon be leaving and began to get on board. There were women with little children, women with babies slung on their backs, an African evangelist wearing a sober black suit and a white, starched 'dog collar.' There were merchants for the Copperbelt and a blind child being taken by her father to school at Fort Rosebery.

The old man with white hair shook hands with his councillors, who, as he left them, clapped the palms of their hands together and bent their knees as they said goodbye.

The driver, who had spent the previous ten minutes under the bonnet of his bus, in what looked like prayer, got up. He dusted the knees of his trousers and his greasy suede shoes. He walked over to Uncle Peter who looked at his watch and nodded in agreement.

"Must we? Do we really have to go?" Simon said.

"Fraid so, Simon. We've said goodbye already; and goodbyes are depressing, aren't they? Suppose you just hop in. I'm sorry I can't come with you, though. Too much to do here. Give my love to your parents, and tell them we want them to come with you, next time."

Uncle Peter shook hands with Mr. van Wyk and kissed Auntie Kay. He tweaked the end of Aileen's nose. This was the first time she had been to boarding school, although she was nine. Uncle Peter said: "Don't forget all the lessons you've done with Mummy, will you Aileen. Well, off you go!"

"Daddy, you will feed Sooty while Mummy's away, won't you? You do promise?" Uncle Peter said that of course he would, and he gave Aileen a final hug. She got in the bus, and called through the window, "Daddy, Sooty likes her meat cut up quite small, remember, and gravy without onions."

Charles was the last to leave. He sat down beside Simon, who was looking forlornly out of the window and thinking to himself: "This isn't the last time I shall visit Africa. I feel sure I shall come here again."

Fussing round inside the bus, Auntie Kay sat in first one seat and then another. She was trying to discover which would be the most comfortable place for Mr. van Wyk. "We must make your journey as easy as possible for you," she said.

"I am most fortunate, Madam, in finding so many people to take care of me. Anyone would think I was a sick man!"

Amongst the African passengers Lazalo found a friend. He was a cousin, so he said. The important thing about the 'cousin' was that he had a guitar slung over his shoulder. When he sat down he pulled it on to his knee and began to touch the strings quietly.

"You'll be having a sing-song before you're ten miles along the road," Uncle Peter said, putting his head round the door of the bus to see they were all settled in.

But the African with the guitar was an artist. He sensed the feeling of expectation and also of depression. He began to play a tune they all knew, and to sing to it words of his own invention. Soon Auntie Kay and the four children, and all the passengers, were joining in the chorus.

"Goodbye, Bwana. Goodbye, Bwana,

Goodbye, Bwana, we're going to leave you now."

Like some gay Mississippi show boat, the mail bus, pulled out. Uncle Peter held his hat in the air and smiled. Everyone waved through the windows. Jennifer sang her

very loudest, almost shouting. "It would be silly," she thought, "to burst into tears. If I sing really hard I won't be able to cry."

"Madame," Mr. van Wyk said, after the song had ended and the Mporokoso Boma was almost out of sight, "I found that little incident infinitely touching."

Auntie Kay just smiled, and he knew that she thought so too. The man with the guitar continued his performance, slipping from familiar folk tunes to the stirring music of American plantation songs. Then he played a popular dance tune with its primitive rhythm, followed by a well-known hymn. The bus was travelling not at thirty miles per hour, but at thirty songs an hour. The musician and chorus had only just begun to grow weary when they passed a large notice board.

"Kalungwishi Pontoon. Please Hoot," was written on the board in huge letters.

The road to the pontoon passed through a village which had suddenly sprung to life. Running from the huts towards the river were some fifteen quaint looking people in motley clothes, followed by two or three children and an excited goat.

"These are the fellows who work the pontoon," Auntie Kay said, turning to explain the apparent pandemonium to Jennifer.

"Not in those hats, surely, Auntie Kay. Never have I seen such a battered collection of lids!"

"They adore hats—the more rakish the better, you know. Look at that proud man over there, with a bunch of imitation cherries hanging from a peaked cap!"

But Jennifer was now watching the wide, gloomy river, which cut the main road in two as mercilessly as a garden spade goes through an earthworm. Like the earthworm, both ends survived. The road on the opposite bank looked in rather better condition than the stony track along which the bus was about to travel. All the passengers got out. In bottom gear the bus groaned, as it moved haltingly

towards the river. Jennifer wanted to look the other way. She was sure it was going to slip into the water.

Held close to the bank was the pontoon, a clumsy raft constructed of empty petrol drums lashed together, supporting a heavy wooden deck.

"How terrifying this is. Does the driver know when to stop once he's on the pontoon?" Simon asked.

"Usually," Charles said in an unconcerned way. "Sometimes they miss the raft or go over the end into the water. There are only those two wooden blocks at the end there to stop them. In the rains, when the banks are muddy, buses and lorries sometimes skid into the river and miss the pontoon completely. But they get them out again."

"I think, you know, that the driver's judgement is usually very good." Mr. van Wyk, whom the children had quite forgotten, suddenly seemed to rejoin the party. "In my school I teach the young boys. When they come first they know nothing. They are like the boys at my home in the Netherlands must have been a thousand years ago. But see, they become bus drivers and clerks and store-keepers. They do well, I think."

"There are many first-class drivers in England," Simon said, "who wouldn't care to take our huge lumbering bus on to that pontoon." Simon watched the skilful way in which the driver brought the bus along the two running boards and then stopped, not more than a foot away from the end of the pontoon—and the river.

Jennifer sighed with relief. It was not going to plunge headlong into the water this time! There was a scramble among the passengers to get across at the same time as their bus; but there was not a great deal of room. Charles, leaning up against one of the mudguards, held one leg out over the water.

"Stop that at once, Charles," his mother called out. "You know the Kalungwishi is full of crocodiles. I don't want any of you falling in." He nearly lost his balance

when the crew began to pull the hawser which guided the contraption and its varied load over the river. Out in midstream there was a refreshing breeze blowing down the wide expanse of water. There was a floating log near a spit of sand at the opposite bank. "A log?" asked Simon, who pointed it out to Charles. "I should have thought a piece of timber would float higher than that."

"Not African hardwood," Charles said. "Wood from these forests is terribly heavy. That's why they can't float logs down river like they do in Canada. They have to be hauled overland." As the pontoon approached the 'log' flayed the water with its tail and disappeared, leaving little eddies in the smooth surface of the water.

"A 'croc'!" Charles called, excitedly. "If only I had a gun!"

The excitement of half-an-hour before was repeated when the bus got off the pontoon on the other bank. The driver hooted for his passengers to come aboard once more. They started off again through the bush towards Kawambwa, where they spent the night in the little thatched rest house.

"Tomorrow we shall be at Fort Rosebery and then, the day after we shall cross the Luapula River," Auntie Kay told them. "You must keep a picture of the map in your mind's eye, and you'll see that we shall be quite near Johnstone Falls where Serafino went to hand in his diamonds from Chiengi."

So they travelled through villages noisy with children and chickens; past gardens where women worked, turning the soil with their hoes. They saw hawkers on bicycles and families, single file, making journeys on foot. Old men sat and dozed at their front doors in deck chairs and young men discussed village events in the local shops. The road, dusty and rough surfaced, crossed dambos and went through woodland, over narrow bridges and across yet another pontoon between Kawambwa and Fort Rosebery, which was the second night-stop on their journey.

At Chembi, some forty miles beyond Fort Rosebery, Jennifer stood on the bank of quite the widest river she had ever seen; but she knew that in some places the river was more than twice as broad as this. As she looked over, she said with glee: "We shall be able to say that we've been in the Belgian Congo as well as in Northern Rhodesia."

Along each bank tall rushes grew, and trees hung with creeper made it look more like the African rivers of her imagination. There were palm trees, too, and she had seen few of these on her recent travels. Upstream, numbers of fishermen in dug-out canoes, whose reflections in the water were almost as distinct as they were themselves, sat quietly in the shade.

This ferry was not the casual affair the Kalungwishi had been, and the power-driven pontoon was operated by one mechanic. On the Congo side it took a little while for the bus to catch up with the passengers, who walked up the hill to wait for it under the shade of a large tree.

Simon noticed that some of the branches were shaking violently. He looked up, but there was no breeze. There was a noise like a penny whistle being blown; but a penny whistle without the pea. It was an unmistakable sound, hysterical and spiteful.

"Look out, Aileen," he cried, but she had already moved away, as a brown monkey dropped from a low branch on to the ground beside her. The small creature looked far more astonished than Aileen. It sat there for a moment, and blinked at the strange, two-legged folk amongst whom it found itself. It stared with puzzled eyes, its skinny eyelids and wrinkled forehead made its travesty of a face even more ugly. It bared its teeth. A companion came down from the tree to join it. Then, with vituperative hissing, they both scampered away into the undergrowth.

"I don't think they look very much like people," Jennifer said, and Mr. van Wyk replied, "Of course not!"

The old man was tired, and Auntie Kay wondered if he would ever get as far as Ndola, let alone Elizabethville. He wanted to travel to the Congo because he had friends there.

Only because the driver was now keeping to the right side of the road instead of the left, did they know they were in another territory. The scenery was the same, the roads equally dusty. There was one difference, however—the ant hills were a different colour and shape from any they had seen before. They were far taller and thinner, and of a ginger colour. They looked like petrified trees.

“I do think it’s odd,” Simon said, “to have to go across a strip of foreign country to get from one part of the territory to another; but a river like the Luapula makes a very tidy boundary between one country and another.”

“It makes the journey seem far more interesting, and we might even have to speak French,” Jennifer reminded him.

Her Aunt laughed. “I think you’d find Chibemba more useful here, than French,” she said.

When this strip of Belgian Congo, this pointing finger, had been crossed, the bus passed through a frontier post such as one sees in Europe. It was not only a frontier between two countries, but a gateway from rural Africa to the growing modern cities of the prosperous Copperbelt.

CHAPTER XX

Rich Reward

THE finding of copper on a large scale changed the life and destiny of Northern Rhodesia. The discovery rang out the primitive world and welcomed in the new.

"I can't believe, when I see these tarmac roads, fine buildings, houses with lovely gardens, that all this is barely twice as old as I am," Simon said. "In England you get used to the fact that buildings have been standing for hundreds of years and you say 'good gracious, that must be twice as old as Mummy and Daddy' " . . .

"Which they find most flattering," Auntie Kay commented, as she stopped with her carload of children at some traffic lights which had turned red.

"Do you remember how cross you were, Mummy, when I asked you if you'd ever known Christopher Wren?"

"I do indeed, Charles; but I was very relieved when I discovered that you really meant Christopher Robin! But I'm sorry, Simon. You were talking about the age of Ndola, Mufulira, Luanshya and all these places."

"I'm not used to the idea of towns being new, Auntie Kay. I suppose people who live in new lands like Canada or Australia don't find it at all strange."

They had driven round the clean, new, towns with Auntie Kay. They had seen smelters and furnaces, railway yards and bars of copper, tip trucks and overhead conveyors. Outside clean office buildings stood large elegant motor-cars. The cinemas and shops flaunted neon lights.

"All this came about between 1930 and 1935," Auntie

Kay told them. "Before that there was only the bush here. Simon is quite right, none of it is much more than thirty years old."

On their way back from Ndola station, where they had just been to see Mr. van Wyk safely on his train for Elizabethville, they noticed on a piece of open ground a crowd of Africans. They were laughing excitedly, clapping their hands and shuffling their feet.

Auntie Kay stopped her little car by the roadside. It rubbed noses with a large Packard. Aileen jumped out and joined the throng. She began to clap too, and to sing the same chant as the Africans.

"Do you know this song, Aileen?" Jennifer said, as she bent down to try and catch the words.

"Ma cow-boy, ma cow-boy, ma cow-boy," called Aileen, her eyes shining with excitement. Jennifer started to clap too; but she couldn't bring herself to say anything as silly as "Ma cow-boy."

"Why do they say that?" she asked Charles.

"Goodness only knows. It makes a good noise, that's about the only reason apart from the fact that they enjoy cowboy films as much as we do. The pole dancer probably thinks he's putting on as good a show as Texas Jo. He is, too."

In an open space in the middle of the crowd an old man as wizened as a prune stood with a twelve-foot pole resting against his shoulder. He looked rather like a man about to toss the caber at some Highland games. As the excitement increased he held the pole upright, one end on the ground. He gave his audience a one-tooth smile and spat on the palms of his hands. The crowd yelled with glee, as he began to jump up and down on the ground, in time with their chant. He gripped the pole firmly and went on jumping; but instead of jumping on the ground he began to jump up the pole. When he reached the top he twisted one arm affectionately around it, and gripped it as well with his knees and ankles.

He blew a 'police' whistle to emphasise the rhythm of 'Ma cow-boy' and began to dance about, making the pole take quite long jumps with himself, perched like a bird at the top.

"Ma cow-boy," yelled the delighted audience, as he pranced around. He went on dancing for several minutes and then, when he tired, he blew one long blast on the whistle and slid to the ground.

"How exciting to see a pole dancer," Aileen exclaimed. "I do think they are clever. Why don't they fall off the top? I'm sure I should, if I tried to."

"All a matter of strong shoulder muscles," Charles explained to Jennifer, who said: "Well, suppose you try." This remark was overheard, and an opening was made for Charles, who was invited to enter the ring. The old man handed him the pole and in derisive tones the crowd began to sing once again. Charles jumped up and down in the approved manner and then leapt on to the pole, which flopped over to one side, making him look as though he were riding a hobby horse. This brought a gust of laughter from his audience. So he tried again, not using his legs, but dragging himself up by his arms. Once again he found himself leap-frogging across the pole. He shook his head and handed the pole back to the owner, who began his performance over again.

Simon said: "I don't think I've ever seen a better balancing trick at any big circus. I wonder why they never have an African pole dancer?"

"Let's suggest it to somebody when we get home," Jennifer replied. "I suppose, though, it's really more exciting out-of-doors here, with everyone around encouraging him."

There was an impatient noise behind them. Some motorist was sounding his horn. Auntie Kay looked round to see a taxi driver trying to edge up to her little car. She was taken aback at first, and then she noticed that she had left her car on a taxi rank. "Oh dear! We must be

going anyway," she called out. "Come on Jennifer, bring Aileen along with you. We should return to our hotel in any case. We all have a big day tomorrow. You and Simon start at seven, and Charles's plane goes about half an hour later to Salisbury."

"I wish I were going to go somewhere too, instead of staying at school at Ndola," Aileen said, sadly.

"Well, you can have fun seeing them all off before you go into school, Aileen," her mother said. "And how about me? You will all be having such an exciting time and I shall have that horrid bus journey ahead of me, back to Mporokoso."

"But Mummy, you're sure to have adventures," Charles tried to comfort her and was a little dismayed when his mother said that adventure on a bus journey was not one of the things she most enjoyed.

The airport bus left the hotel at six o'clock in the morning, for the seven o'clock plane. It was a great effort to wake up, finish packing and have some breakfast by this early hour.

In the airport waiting room irritable people hurried to and fro; more docile folk dozed quietly until they were called. There was a dull roar of engines, and trollies laden with suitcases and parcels rattled past the window.

"Mummy, what did Daddy's telegram say?" Aileen asked. Her mother looked startled and she put her hand inside the pocket of her suit. She produced a ginger-brown envelope.

"How awful of me," she said. "I was packing when it was handed to me, and then I was called to the telephone. I meant to read it properly the moment I got back. Then Jennifer told me her toothpaste had squeezed out all over her school blazer. Never mind. It will be more fun to see it now because I expect it's to say goodbye to Jennifer and Simon and Charles." She took several pages out of the envelope. While she read it, Auntie Kay said, "Good gracious," and, "Just fancy that."

"Mummy, what does it say? Daddy has said goodbye in a lot of words." Impatiently, Aileen tried to read what it was all about.

"This is a copy of a telegram sent to Mporokoso," Auntie Kay said. "It's addressed to Charles and Aileen Plender, and Jennifer and Simon Muir."

"That's us!" Simon looked interested.

"It says Aileen too," said an excited voice.

"Yes, but I'll tell you what else it says. Now listen carefully.

"The Brightstones Diamond Corporation expresses its sincere thanks to four young detectives who exposed illicit diamond route from Tanganyika. Present successful operations against smugglers entirely due to information received from you stop. Brightstones arranging one hundred and fifty pounds reward to each detective whose aid they hope to enlist again in future."

Auntie Kay paused and looked round at the astonished faces of the four travellers. She went on: "The telegram was handed in at Johannesburg and is signed 'Brightstones'. They are just about the biggest diamond people in the world."

"One hundred and fifty pounds for me," Jennifer said in bewilderment.

"We shall have to arrange to transfer it to you in England, when it comes through," Auntie Kay said.

"How wonderful. We can come out again without costing Daddy all that money."

"Simon and I could equip an expedition up the Zambezi," Charles said.

Aileen asked: "Would one hundred and fifty pounds buy me a helicopter, Mummy?"

"Don't be silly, Aileen. You know you can't use helicopters in this part of Africa—the altitude's too great. The thing can't lift itself off the ground." Charles looked at her scornfully and thought, "How little a girl takes in."

"Passengers . . . for Nairobi and London . . ." called a brassy voice from a loudspeaker hanging on the wall.

"Darlings, that's you two," Auntie Kay said, giving them both a hug. "Look, you'd better take this wonderful telegram. We can always ask for another copy, and I'm sure you'd like to have it. Got your passports? Yellow fever certificates? Tickets? Good! I'll come through with you until they turn me back." So off they went, leaving Aileen and Charles both rather dazed and astounded, sitting on one of the comfortable sofas.

Jennifer and Simon were only two days late for school. People kept asking Jennifer if she'd been having measles during her holidays. When she said "No," then they said "Mumps?"

"Haven't you had anything? We thought you must, because you're two days late for the beginning of term," said one girl whom Jennifer disliked, because she was always prying.

"I got back from my holiday the day before yesterday," Jennifer replied, as she put some coloured pencils out on the top of her desk. "Then I had to get my school trunk."

"That's no excuse," said the inquisitive one. "We'd all have liked an extra two days holiday." There were several girls listening to the conversation now.

"It just so happens that the 'planes didn't fit in."

"Where on earth have you been?" a chorus of voices enquired. The girl who had originally questioned Jennifer saw that she was no longer the centre of interest and resented it.

"I was in British Central Africa," replied Jennifer, after a pause. This was too much for her inquisitor. She said: "Very funny indeed. I had a happy summer holiday in Timbuktul!"

"You probably think that's very amusing," Jennifer answered with dignity. "But if you knew enough about

Geography, you'd know that you could, quite easily have been in. . . ."

There was a scuffling sound as the girls slid back to their desks and another wave of shuffling as they got to their feet. The form mistress came in and put some books on her desk. Someone went over and closed the door.

"We are not going to have the lesson on the time-table," Miss Smith told them, "because Jennifer Muir can give you a much more interesting one. I'm going to ask her if she will tell us about her holiday in Northern Rhodesia. It is one of the three countries of which the new Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland is formed."

Jennifer, with a look of surprise, got up from her desk and turned to face her form. As she did so, she winked at the girl who had been so ready to doubt her.

